RESISTING THE LIMITS OF THE PERFORMING BODY

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For Sami T.

Who made it possible, as well as improbable

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores masochism as a performance trope investigating the relationship between the politics of cultural production and masochistic performance practices. By examining the work of a number of contemporary artists, particularly artists whose work is concerned with broaching or subverting the physical and psychical limits of the body, this thesis asserts that masochistic works present a provocation and resistance to patriarchal discourses of power, in particular those practices and disciplines of power/ knowledge responsible for the constitution of 'desirable' subjectivity. For the purposes of this thesis 'desirable' denotes both a Foucauldian sense of the 'docile' social subject conforming to the disciplinary technologies of society, combined with the idea of high modernity's capitalist driven economic dependence on the perpetuation of consumer 'desire'. In order to undertake this investigation, an understanding of theoretical and cultural masochism has been utilised in relation to certain forms of performance practice. Drawing upon an understanding of Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject and the cultural construction of the 'obscene' and their significance in relation to the constitution of the subject, this thesis analyses the points at which the abject, the obscene and the discourse of masochism intersect and interrogate acculturated ideas concerning the acceptable limits of re/presentation and the social subject. Through a discussion of the diverse range of perspectives on masochism, coupled with it's abject and 'obscene' inflections, this thesis considers the utility of masochistic actions in investigating contemporary subjectivity and its temporary, masochistically induced loss. In so doing this thesis extends its analysis to elaborate the cultural and socio-political significance of presenting/ representing alternative subjectivity through means of masochistic performances that work in opposition to the patriarchally constructed, sado-masochistic cultural economy of 'desire'.

RESISTING THE LIMITS OF THE PERFORMING BODY : An Introduction

> Everyday life is primarily a surface phenomenon, but the examined life - getting to the heart of things involves the painful process of dissection. For most of us, dissection is a metaphor for intellectual examination, but for others it is a physical act.[1]

This thesis will offer a detailed exploration of masochism as an alternative means of representation in performance art by addressing how masochism in its various manifestations may be understood to interrogate contemporary preoccupations with the visceral and transitory nature of the body, its spiritual and cultural inscriptions, and its status as the locus of the self. I will undertake an examination of selected performance 'texts', drawn from archives of contemporary experimental theatre, performance and body art, in order to assess how the body's endurance in extreme performance may be used to revise our understanding of masochistic subjectivity.

This chapter will begin by outlining my aims and objectives on a chapter by chapter basis. During the course of each chapter I will consider what particular aspects of the performer's work have led me to designate their work as masochistic. The methodology I have adopted for the purposes of this thesis involves an analysis of live and recorded performances that uses both a model of subjectivity based upon a number of psychoanalytic and socio-cultural approaches. I have brought these models together through their shared concern with the operation of social and familial power and I have used them to elaborate the dynamics and potentials of masochistic action. This method enables me to locate what I believe to be the key concerns that masochistic performance work makes manifest. While this analysis is necessarily subjective

and partial, I hope, in the process, to establish an argument for the broader cultural importance and significance of masochism as an alternative performance practice.

This chapter will now go on to examine more closely the different approaches to subjectivity that I utilise in the main body of the thesis, considering the complexities and contrasts of these models and their possible relationship to masochistic subjectivity. Next I will provide an overview of my concern with the cultural politics of socio-cultural masochism as a structuring economy in society and culture. I will use this overview to clarify just how I will be using a number of key terms connected with these ideas. Finally I will provide an extensive examination of a number of theoreticians ideas concerning the nature and function of masochism and determine how these discourses may be used to inform my argument.

My second chapter is primarily concerned with the work of Marina Abramović. Abramović is seen by many to be a seminal figure in the development of the logics of masochistic performance practice, and this is why the historical and narrative line of Abramović's work is both important and interesting to track. By charting Abramović's changing concerns as an artist I will to trace aesthetic, cultural and political issues that return in the works of others. These issues include a concern with the flesh body, temporality, resistance and control. Additionally, an historical and narrative approach enables me to make some necessary distinctions between the masochistic techniques and approaches used by Abramović and other performance artists like Orlan, who was also producing work at this time, but in quite different circumstances and with clearly different emphases. The major organising thematic throughout the thesis is

masochism, whose dynamics are traced in all the performances discussed, although the aesthetic, cultural and political context of this masochism will vary depending on the particular focus chosen for individual chapters. This allows for a consideration of similarities and disparities between artists, their work and their aims, linking them through their common use of masochistic elements.

My third chapter, on Karen Finley, is intended to broaden the terrain of my argument to consider how masochistic subjectivity was utilised to offer a critique of preoccupations and concerns of North American society and the so-called 'culture wars' of the 1980s and 1990s, and to examine how the 'obscene' and the abject intersected with a masochistic discourse. I will use the controversy that surrounded Finley's work as a device through which to frame and investigate notions of socially sanctioned masochism, which I define, using a Foucauldian framework, as actions undertaken in a bid to conform or comply with social mores and conventions resulting from an individual's acculturation within a particular society. These actions may necessarily require the submission or deference to others perceived to be more influential or powerful than themselves. Or these actions may require, or may be perceived by the individual concerned as requiring, forbearance of actions from others that may inhibit or 'harm' the said individual in ways that are beyond the control of that individual.

In Chapter Four, I will examine masochistic subjectivity in relation to illness, homosexuality and practices of body modification. I will consider these ideas in relation to the context and performance work of the North American Ron Athey. In particular I am interested in examining how Athey masochistically works with gender boundaries and physical thresholds. Additionally I want to extend the

political terrain of my analysis to consider how Athey's work represented a critique of, and by extension, a threat to accepted and acceptable conceptions of subjectivity and the 'sick' body, and how the notion of the audience's 'witnessing' is implicated in this. This investigation is important to my thesis because it broadens my argument for the potential efficacy of masochistic actions that include 'pain' and restraint as central to the making process.

My aim in chapter five is to comparatively consider issues of gender and subjectivity in relation to the use of blood and bleeding in performances by Franko B and Kira O'Reilly. In addition, the use of blood allows me to further consider Kristevan notions of the abject in relation to these works, and to suggest how the abject may be recouped through masochistic means. As a number of masochistic works I am dealing with involve the breaking of the skin, I feel it is important to the project of my thesis to consider the implications of blood and bleeding. I will begin by looking at what I consider to be historic and religious precursors of these artists' actions before analysing performances that use the historical symbol of bleeding stigmata as a core stimulus for the artist.

As with my chapter on Abramović, my final chapter dealing with the work of Orlan, seeks to provide an historical context whilst focusing specifically on Orlan's most significant performance project to date: *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*. By contrast with Abramović's work, which evolved and mutated in different directions over a prolonged period of time, Orlan has spent over ten years dealing with a single project with multiple forms that have retained one primary aim. This aim is to use the trope of cosmetic surgery as a means of interrogating the contentious idea that our identity, and sense of self, is defined and restrained by our corporeality. An examination of Orlan's work is important

to the project of my thesis because of its fundamental concern with the question of identity, specifically the difficulty in locating what is meant and understood by identity, as well as identity's impact on subjectivity. In this chapter I demonstrate how Orlan's work illustrates the possibilities and limitations of a subjectivity forged masochistically, addressing how her work operates on both a personal and political level.

Theories of Subjectivity

I will now consider the differing paradigms of subjectivity offered by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Jean-François Lyotard, paying particular attention to how these theorists conception of subjectivity impacts upon notions of a masochistic subjectivity. Taking these various theories as a ground for further analysis I will utilise a synthesis of these approaches developed from their understandings of the operation of social and familial power, a power that is key to any figuring of the significance of masochistically derived resistance.

Many of Freud's ideas concerning subjectivity are expressed in his work *The Ego and the Id*, which was first published in 1923, and was a development of his ideas concerning the divisions of the mind and drive theory. As Freud saw it, the subject evolved as a result of conflicting instincts and impulses experienced both consciously and subconsciously, that have to be managed and regulated in order for the subject to conform to familial and societal norms. The subconscious is considered the location of repressed sensations, impulses and desires. Additionally, elements of this model are the id, the ego and the superego. The id is considered to be part of the subconscious, and it's function

is to release energy and tension resulting from any stimulation the subject receives[2]. The id does this instinctively without thought for the consequences of spontaneous, unreflective actions, but is concerned only with the instant gratification of its desire[3]. It is understood by Freud as the most impulsive and selfish aspect of the self. By contrast, the superego is seen by Freud as the moral and judicial force in personality. Its impulse is to work towards achieving an ideal or perfection, but it does this without taking reality into account. The superego instigates a moral code derived from the subject's parents. Thus the moral authority of the parents is assimilated to become the internalised moral authority of the child[4]. Finally, the ego, or conscious mind, is understood by Freud to work at the intersection of the id and the superego. Its role is to try to achieve a harmonious balance between these two contrasting forces and reality[5]. In addition Freud believed that early psycho-physical development was important in the formation of subjectivity. In the course of 'normal' development, an individual is expected to move progressively through a series of stages. The first of these is the oral stage, which occurs during the first year of life, and centres on the mouth as a source of gratification, because of its association with attachment to the mother/caregiver and nourishment via the breast/bottle. The second or anal stage occurs between the child's second and third year and centres on and around the anal area. It is during this time that the child develops a sense of autonomy as it masters the ability to retain or release its bowels. The phallic stage occurs between the ages of four and six years. During this stage the genital area becomes the source of libidinal pleasure. It is at this time that Freud believed boys developed what he termed 'castration complex' and girls develop 'penis envy'. Freud's model of this stage is formulated around penis possession or absence, considering the analogous female organs to be inferior, and clearly privileging the male above the female.

The female is conceived in terms of 'lack'. It is also at this time that the Oedipus Complex and attempts at its resolution occur. According to Freud, as a little boy grows up he comes to consider the father as a rival for possession of the mother or primary love object. Consequently the little boy wishes to eliminate or 'kill' the father in order to gain exclusive access to the mother. However, he also knows that the father is far more powerful than the little boy, so resolves this internal conflict by resigning himself to a secondary position, repressing his feelings towards the father and instead attempting to be like his father, and in this way gain his mother's attentions[6]. Freud's emphasis on male subject formation at this stage again reflects his patriarchal bias. The female subject's psycho-sexual development is later theorised as the Electra Complex, but this model uses the male Oedipus complex as a template: the parameters of Freud's female model are thus already pre-determined by the male.

Following the resolution of the Oedipal (and Electra) stage, there is a Latency Stage, where social skills, morals and education are understood to predominate, while sexual norms and stereotypes are reinforced. At puberty the Genital stage occurs, and the focus of the individual is understood to shift from same sex peers to other sex peers and socially acceptable heterosexual relations are developed.

Freud's model emphasises both drive theory, the subconscious and the importance of familial relations in the development of the subject, so that the 'normal' socially-acceptable individual evolves as a result of a dynamic interaction of conscious and unconscious impulses, conflicts, repressions and resolutions that centre around the family and the world surrounding and interacting with the subject. Freud's model is important to the framing of my

argument because essentially Freud's model is a model of conflict between the contrasting demands of the individual and society that require the subject to masochistically submit in order to function socially. Masochistic denial thus plays a key part in the subject's attempts to resolve and compensate for competing personal and social demands. However, Freud's model does not acknowledge the potential agency of a subject who chooses to embrace, then manipulate and remake the effect of socially demanded masochistic actions, in order to resist the repression required of the individual under patriarchy. For instance, elements of behaviour, like the need to masochistically suspend the immediate gratification of sexual impulses, is not rejected but rather adhered to in the extreme. Sexual gratification is not merely delayed in the interest of social functioning, but to the point where the delay or suspension becomes the end in itself, thus perverting the original intention of the behavioural sanction to an alternative route that obstructs rather than assists the operation of social and familial power. The elements of masochistic behaviour required socially by the individual are not resisted through a rejection of these behaviours, but by a meticulous and extreme adherence to the requirements of these behaviours. This is something I will return to later in the chapter when I discuss Freud's theories of sexuality and masochism.

The work of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, developed his own approach to psychoanalysis using the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. I am interested in Lacan's work because it provides a useful link between Freud's psychoanalytic model of masochism and a culturally informed psychoanalytic model of masochism, which is reflected in Lacan's concern with language and language's links with patriarchal authority. Lacan's basic premise is that the subject is formed through language. Like Freud, Lacan believed the

subject moved through a number of developmental stages, in Lacan these are termed the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. And like Freud, Lacan maintains the centrality of the masculine in subjectivity.

The idea of the Imaginary is based upon Lacan's idea that the mind, on a primary level, works with images rather than with words. During this early stage the child's world is dominated by narcissistic fantasies, which are developed in relation to the mother, so that the child feels an illusory sense of unity and wholeness. (The mother, at this stage, is understood as a conglomeration of part objects or l'objet petit a: breast, voice, hand.) Lacan believed that the ego developed through a departure from the Imaginary into the world of language and the Symbolic order. However, in order to make the transition between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the child goes through what Lacan called the Mirror stage.

Between the ages of six and eighteen months the child becomes aware of its separateness and its representation in the world, a representation that is soon undermined by its transparency as an image of wholeness[7]. Through the 'mirror' the child establishes a view of herself from the world outside of herself, that is then internalised. In this way the child begins to locate herself in relation to that which is beyond herself – the 'other' (objects, people, etc), and through this recognition, she realises her separateness. However, this realisation also carries with it a sense of alienation. For in the mirror the child perceives her own borders and integrity, but soon discovers that she still lacks personal autonomy, physical dexterity and co-ordination, creating a sensation of a 'body-in-bits-and-pieces', and thus opening up and making manifest the gap between image and reality. Therefore, this period of a child's development is understood

to be a violent and frustrating stage. Lacan believed that the subject always retains this sense of alienation, because she is always constructed according to an 'other'.

The importance of Lacan's mirror stage in subject formation is particularly significant to a masochistic subjectivity interested in trying to use masochism as a means of seeking integration between the image or representation of the body (the objectified body) and the subject's experience of their own body. Masochistic subjectivity may be interpreted in a Lacanian light as an attempt to revisit and perhaps to some extent resolve the losses incurred at the mirror stage. This is something I will discuss in more detail in chapters 3 and 5. Furthermore, in Lacan's terms, if it is only through fantasy that the subject may return to the Imaginary; masochistic subjectivity, with it's use of fantasy as a key element, may offer up a means of connecting with a more complete sense of oneself that is not only a derivative model based on the images of the self reflected back to the subject via the other.

Before language is acquired Lacan believed the ego did not exist. It was not until the subject could say 'I', that she was understood as having a functioning ego. Once the subject is able to give a name to an object, it is an acknowledgement that that object is separate from oneself. Naming an object, that is, using a signifier, also suggests that the presence of that object is no longer necessary. In this way the Symbolic order is assimilated by the subject through language. However, Lacan noted that language can not fully express the nature of experience, and the necessity of using language constitutes a 'trauma' for every subject. Instead of remaining blissfully cocooned in a narcissistic relationship with the mother, the subject has to work with words in

order to gain what she desires. It is the world outside of language, or that which cannot be expressed by language that Lacan calls the Real. It is that territory that lies beyond both the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Lacan's subject attempts to make sense of all of life's experiences through her absorption into the Symbolic order. It presupposes that the subject will agree to and adhere to this system of meanings and hierarchies, and that for every signifier there will be a signified. But Lacan also emphasises the inadequacies of words in expressing human experience and that by entering into the Symbolic, the subject loses the sense of unity and completeness felt during the Imaginary. Lacan, like Freud, understands socio-cultural masochism to be implicit in subjectivity because Lacan's understanding of the subject, is as one who is formed as a social being through a painful alienation from an original sense of unity. That is, the pleasure and security of the Imaginary, must be relinquished in order to become a part of the social world. This masochistic submission is necessary in order to conform to the dictates of the Symbolic order and to deal with the imperative of using language to communicate socially and to have one's needs met. However, the resistant masochistic subject, acknowledges and tries to overcome the sense of loss Lacan articulates in an alternative fashion. She does this by investing deeply in the physical. Actions on the body of a masochist may be carried out or conditions endured without attempts to 'make sense' of these experiences through language. Language, therefore, is unlikely to be seen as the most effective mode of communicating in the masochistic universe. Moreover, failing to use language may be interpreted as an attempt to leave behind Lacan's Symbolic order, confirming that there are many ways of communicating beyond the linguistic.

My approach is additionally informed by the writing of Michel Foucault. His ideas enable me to make important links between the psychoanalytic models of Freud and Lacan and a social constructionist model of subject formation. That is, through Foucault, I have been able to connect and integrate conceptions of the family, language and discourse as disciplinary powers that operate upon the subject masochistically. According to Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991), the subject is formed through the body and it's relationships with power. The subject becomes "an effect of power" that results from its submission to and interaction with the disciplinary regimes instituted by the family, schools, hospitals, asylums and the army.[8] The routines and habituated ways of functioning condoned by these institutions constantly inscribe and reinforce certain gestures, behaviours and ways of using the body that render the body 'docile', and through docility the subject becomes efficient and productive[9]. In order to maintain docility in the subject Foucault looked at the way in which power operated on and through the subject. Foucault suggested that by the middle of the 19th century power had relocated from where it was understood to reside in kingship and monarchy. By this time it was no longer a top-down system with the authority of God and King designating and controlling what are and are not appropriate actions, - i.e. power was no longer understood as an overtly repressive force coming from outside of the subject. Foucault, using the idea of Bentham's panopticon, illustrated how the forces of disciplinary power operated in a prison setting and by extension on all aspects of social life, through surveillance; surveillance as an extension of institutional authority like that established within the penal system, educational establishments, hospitals, asylums and the army. The Foucauldian subject is acculturated, that is, learns through her cultural interactions, to behave in

accordance with the 'rules' of a particular societal set-up and, in part, this is because the subject believes their actions are observed and monitored by others and that any deviation from these 'rules' will result in exclusion or punishment of some sort. This model, however, still requires an externally perceived authority to ensure complicity. However, Foucault went on to suggest that power was more evasive than this model suggests. That power operates effectively because it is an internalised force – that is, subjects become self-surveillant and tend to survey themselves in accordance with dominant discourses. However, Foucault noted that if subjects are aware of the constructed nature of their subjectivity, it should be possible for them to re-create their subjectivity in ways that are self-determined and creative, and acknowledge subjectivity as just another fiction, and as fiction, it is a story that may be 'retold'.

In the context of such discourse of power, this thesis will argue that the masochistic subject is a deliberately non-productive subject, by which I mean, the masochistic subject does not look to be efficient and disregards the usual or accepted demand to carry out actions that have determinable and quantifiable value and purpose in discursive terms. Contrary to Foucault's docile subject, the masochist seeks to be at the centre of vision and does not find the policing quality of surveillance or 'being watched' in any way inhibitive or restraining. Indeed the masochist seeks out and demands we watch and witness his/her actions. Digressions or suspensions that delay or prolong an activity from reaching an endpoint, result or resolution, are conceived as inefficient and contrary to 'correct' functioning. Speed is valued where time is money. However, such suspense is fundamental to a masochistic subjectivity. Late-capitalist society depends upon the disciplined subject contributing

efficiently and predictably to the cultural (and financial) economy, so to disrupt or withhold/suspend 'productive' interactions within this economy creates a subversive potential.

However, Foucault's model actually accommodates both those subjects who appear to conform, i.e. are 'productive' and 'efficient' citizens, as well as those who, self-aware, appear to resist the prevailing ideals for subjectivity and re-create themselves. That is, Foucault's model suggests that because all subjects are formed by disciplinary regimes, any ideas for resistance must also have been created within this paradigm and are, as such, part of the paradigm. In this way, no subject stands outside the subject constructing framework, rendering any and all 'resistant' or 'remade' subjectivity potentially recoupable.

However, this notion of a 'remade' subject is also something Judith Butler works with in her writing, and is useful to me because it suggests that resistance is both possible and efficacious and like the other models of subjectivity I have been examining, it circulates around systems of power. Butler, like Foucault, understands the subject to be moulded in relation to socio-cultural and physical forces, which acculturate the subject according to the customs and norms of a particular society. In particular, Butler believes the subject is performatively produced through a "stylised repetition of acts", that accumulatively and continuously reinforce the gendered identity and behaviour of the subject[10]. After establishing the idea that subjectivity is derived from repeated acts, Butler notes, the way in which repetition or rather the potential to break with repetition, opens up the possibility for the formation of alternatives or what Butler calls

> The possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect

of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction[11].

This model is important to my thesis because it suggests a ground of action through which the subject potentially may express their agency through performance in relation to discourses of power. Later we will see what kind of repetitions and subversions are enacted in masochistic performances.

Additionally, Butler's theories reveal the constructed nature of all sexuality and identity so that even actions that are deemed to be 'natural' under patriarchy, like heterosexuality, may be revealed as 'acts' that have been naturalised through repetition. Butler's model, moreover, aids me in making a link between performance undertaken deliberately and consciously, and acculturated performative acts. However, like the Foucauldian model there remains the problem that if all subject's are produced as an effect of power, then all actions, including actions that apparently re-work conceptions of gender, fall within this framework. Additionally Butler's model seems to assume that the subject begins life as a tabula rasa, and that everything that contributes to the subject's sense of self is determined culturally even sex itself. This position would appear to ignore the materiality of the body, which writers like Susan Bordo, insist on retaining[12]. Bordo argues that unless we acknowledge the material nature of the body, we risk erasing the specific subject position from which an individual speaks, which is particularly important to subjects traditionally excluded from discourse. However, Butler's ideas to do with the performativity of identity and subjectivity, coupled with the masochistic concern with engaging with the physical, which foregrounds the particularity of the body involved, goes some way towards overcoming the objections to Butler's model raised by Bordo.

In addition to models of subjectivity that could be linked through their shared concern with operations of power, the work on abjection by Julia Kristeva, who surmises that the subject is formed through her relationship with the abject, is important to the project of my thesis. Within the context of my thesis, Kristeva's work will provide an additional means of reflecting on aspects of masochistic subjectivity. According to Kristeva the abject is that which the subject is no longer, the "jettisoned object", that which has fallen away from the subject but remains as a residue or reminder to the subject of what is no longer part of her.

> These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live,...[13]

The substance of the abject includes the "excremental and menstrual": sweat, blood, urine, saliva, tears, semen and faeces. Although it should be noted that neither tears nor semen are deemed to have a polluting effect according to Kristeva's interpretation because neither semen nor tears are connected with the threat to identity posed by the "decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc." of the excremental.[14]

Furthermore, these same abject materials additionally reminds the subject of the separation from the maternal that is necessary for subjectivity to take place. The subject's awareness of and connection with these bodily substances is interpreted by Kristeva as posing a recognisable reminder and threat to the subject's sense of themselves. The abject reminds the subject of their corporeality and mortality. It continually overhangs the subject because in the course of daily life the substance of the abject is impossible to avoid.

Kristeva's theory suggests that the subject isn't just formed by an awareness of what it is not, but is complicated by an awareness of the body's zones of liminality and the apparent 'danger' posed by these areas as they reveal the disorderly nature of subjecthood in its constant state of flux. The masochistic subject, with their often active engagement with the abject, acknowledges the temporality and liminality of the body and its borders[15]. Indeed the masochistic subject embraces the liminal and may take pleasure in directly confronting or dealing with the abject nature of the body. In this way the masochistic subject uses the abject to demonstrate their control - embracing rather than rejecting the substance of the body as well as bodily substances. Furthermore, the relationship of the masochistic subject with the abject, forces us to consider how the abject may be used to offer a critique of the productive, efficient "clean and proper body" in part because of the way it reveals the incompleteness and instability of subjectivity, which may be an alienating and / or liberating experience, and in part, because of the way the abject destabilises all notions of system and order, bringing into question our sense of identity, authority and truth.

Moreover, a number of the ideas of Jean François Lyotard concerning 'truth' and the questionable 'authority' of discourse, provide another nuance to my model. As a theorist of the postmodern, Lyotard argued in his arguably best-known work *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), that the postmodern is characterised by an expression of "incredulity" towards "grand-narratives". That is, established and monolithic socio-cultural and political discourses or 'narratives' were increasingly called into question, particularly in relation to their claims on 'truth'. Lyotard argues that such 'narratives' are self-legitimising and effectively support the structures of power that are already established. That is,

what becomes 'truth' is that which confirms and re-enforces what is already 'known' about a society and that society's understanding of itself. Lyotard and his questioning of 'legitimate' power and how power is legitimated is something that I draw upon particularly when discussing the historical positioning of Marina Abramović. It was at the time of Abramović's emergence as an artist in the late sixties that old hierarchies and systems of power in the West appeared to be under sustained attack. In this resulting cultural climate, Lyotard theorised a subject that exists and is formed in relation to a world that no longer has a fixed system of values and hierarchies that pin-points and defines the individual and their role in a 'bigger picture' or scheme of things. This subject is a wanderer, a nomad defined by accident or chance encounters and occurrences that have no definitely fixed meaning / value, but for Lyotard this does not mean that the subject is completely groundless, but rather that an increased flexibility is offered up by the condition of postmodernity.

> A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island;
> each exists in a fabric of relations that are now more complex
> and mobile than ever before.[16]

In the process of undercutting traditional discourses, the subject, in some respects is 'cut free'. That is, the scepticism shown towards 'grand narratives' may have a liberating effect upon the subject, who is no longer necessarily required to reveal their 'essence' or their inner reality by reference to their 'desire' as they do in Freud and Lacan's narratives, nor are they necessarily defined by mechanisms of 'power', as Foucault and Butler suggest. The structure of the postmodern subject is its apparent structurelessness, its relativity, its acknowledged meaninglessness. The power of the postmodern subject perhaps lies in the admission of defeat; the refusal to try to 'make sense' of itself and the world, the subject's flux and seemingly ever increasing

complexities. Its weakness perhaps lies in the insecurity and fear this acknowledgement brokers and the fact that location and fixity for the subject may be considered important to women and minorities traditionally excluded from discourse.

Combining elements of psychoanalytic, social constructionist and post-modern perspectives, I have been able to synthesise a useful analytical model based upon a shared concern with mechanisms of social, familial and discursive power and its operation on the subject. The elements of this model can be negotiated and made productive because the masochistic subject, as I am defining it, is a subject who embraces rather than shies from the possibilities, risks and ambiguities whilst retaining her specificity as a subject in a dynamic process of identity formation. So, rather than understanding the subject in terms of loss – of authority, 'certainty', and groundedness, the masochistic subject is spurred on by, indeed, intrinsically part of the blurred, transient, multiple, toying with subjectivity. But this subject is one that still holds and returns to a core set of embodied and located parameters which are concerned with the power play in gender. This formulation has similarities with what Rebecca Schneider in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) calls a "both at once" theorising of subjectivity which combines social constructivist and essentialist elements[17]. I believe it is the masochistic subject's ability to work at the promising, paradoxical and perilous limits of subjectivity explored in this thesis, that is at the root of masochism's potential as a generative and healing force.

Socio-cultural masochism

My concern with the cultural politics of masochistic performance is derived from my understanding that the work of artists and performers is placed in a dynamic interaction with cultural and political forces in society. Throughout this thesis I will see the role of performance as a cultural practice that may re-make or revise societal ideas, challenge conceptions, celebrate and / or expose the consistencies and inconsistencies inherent in a society and it's power structures. In particular I will focus on performance's power to subvert hegemonic structures like those perpetuated by capitalism and patriarchy that continue to dominate cultural discourse and contribute to power disparities and social injustice. If, as I have suggested through my use of Foucault, the subject is subject to the various forces of disciplinary power in society, then the masochistic subject, empowered through a Butlerian form of performative re/ enactment, liberated from the limiting possibilities of 'language' and the Symbolic order as Lacan formulated it, presents us with an alternative economy of pain and pleasure from within society that does not adhere to the dominating ethos. The masochistic subject refuses the masochism inherent in the capitalist economy that is used and promoted to create docility, productivity and shared temporal templates, but instead seeks to re/define our understanding of what constitutes pleasurable or painful pursuits and contemporary subjectivity.

I want to suggest that acts of socio-cultural masochism, that is, actions condoned by society that are understood as 'painful' but necessary for the overall benefit of the subject or society, are the basis of disciplining regimes enacted through the body, society and institutions to maximise the potential of the subject to effectively use 'time' and the self for 'productive' purposes. In a capitalist consumerist economy, the good or "docile" Foucauldian subject working within an institution, may be considered most 'productive' when it is

'producing' the most, for the least effort / expenditure when at 'work', and consuming the most when not working. Social and cultural forces work to acculturate subjects into a basically repressive masochistic 'work and consume' ethic that serves and ensures the overall 'productivity' of capitalist society. Subjects are apparently 'free' to exercise agency but are acculturated to take 'pleasure' in consumption as a reward for the 'pain' of the working regime.

Under patriarchy, as I see it, society is ordered through a hierarchy based upon gender difference. According to Kate Millett, this hierarchy begins with the family where male authority and domination is played out on an intimate and daily basis[18]. The subject, under the laws of patriarchy, can expect to be acculturated to or acquire through it's relationships with institutions including the family, an understanding of gender that accords with fairly rigid binary models of what constitutes a male subject or a female subject. This subject engages in processes of continuous social and cultural inscription, that is, the gendered subject learns through it's relationships with others, how that body is expected to perform in certain spaces, and what particular and appropriate ways of functioning will conform to or disrupt expectations. In a patriarchal system, a lesser status and value is assigned women and women's roles in order that men can maintain their privileged position. This subordination of women encourages the dynamics of sado-masochistic interpersonal and work relationships that generally disadvantage and dis-empower women. I am not referring here to self-consciously consensual sexual power plays enacted in the private domain, but power plays that have become internalised and are so deeply culturally inscribed that they are understood to be part of a 'natural' hierarchy. It is this interpretation of the subject and capitalist patriarchy's investment in socially sanctioned masochistic and sado-masochistic actions, that I understand to be a part of a structuring regime in society and culture in

the West, and that I believe is challenged by alternative performance work that uses liberatory, socially unsanctioned, masochistic performance practices as radical intervention and critique.

Having elaborated models of subjectivity and their relation to the operation of power in culture and society and the place that masochism may occupy in relation to these powers, I want to examine the historical discourse that has constructed our understanding of masochism. I will do this by giving a detailed account of various clinical, literary and cultural interpretations of masochism, using the writings of Richard Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, Theodor Reik, Gilles Deleuze, Nick Mansfield, Leo Bersani, Karen Horney, Kathy O'Dell and Karmen MacKendrick. I do this in part to determine how the specific historical and socio-political context effected how masochistic acts were and are interpreted, but also to critique these theoretical perspectives and consider how these discourses might be useful to my arguments and the agency of masochistic performance. So I will chart the development of masochism from its 'naming' as a psychosexual aberration through to its current psychic and cultural mutation that, I am arguing, provides a means to resist the limits of contemporary subjectivity.

Masochism as a Psychoanalytic Site

Deleuze notes that Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, an author renowned as "the Turgeniev of Little Russia" was greatly distressed at having his name used by Krafft-Ebing in *Sexualis Pathologia* to classify a perversion.[19] Deleuze also notes that Krafft-Ebing was responsible for suggesting that this 'perversion' not only connected pain with sexual pleasure but gave his designation of Masoch-

ism suggestions of bondage and humiliation.[20] However, this process of naming and classification verified the reality of this 'perverse' practice; by providing a definition the 'condition' was given substance and could therefore be considered a site for psychoanalytic investigation.

In Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), sadism and masochism are presented as the "most significant of all the perversions"[21]. Masochism is understood to be simply the reverse 'passive' form of sadism. Freud refers to Schrenck-Notzing's earlier 1899 terminology "algolagnia" used to describe sadism, which he implies is the original disorder, and that sadism with its aggressive impulses is an inherent feature of male sexuality[22]. Such aggression is understood by Freud to be necessary because of "the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing"[23]. That is, essentially Freud 'naturalises' sadist impulses as masculine, a part of 'normal' reproductive activity, unless "satisfaction is entirely conditional on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object", which he concedes to be pathological[24]. Masochism as sadism's counterpart is seen as sadism "turned around upon the subject"[25]. In this way Freud understood masochism to be a greater pathology than sadism because of what he considered to be its greater distance from 'normal' male sexuality. That is that "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness - a desire to subjugate."[26] Furthermore, because masochism was considered 'passive' by Freud, he coupled it with the 'natural' (as he understood it) passive role of the female in heterosexual intercourse. Deleuze, writing in 1967 in a response to Freud's work, understood sadism and masochism to be completely separate formations bearing only superficial analogous similarities. It is Deleuze, who indicated an inconsistency in Freud's

reasoning with respect to this idea of masochism being essentially sadism turned upon the self, that is, that masochism is sadism transformed. Freud had previously argued in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) that such transformations were *not* possible because the instincts Eros and Thanatos are qualitatively different. That is, Eros is concerned with the impulse for life and discontinuity, whereas Thanatos or the death drive is concerned with trying to achieve continuity or death and that these instincts were not transmutable. However, Deleuze points out that the Death instinct (drive) can operate in two different ways. That is, under Eros it may manifest itself as sadism or an externally directed impulse, but it may also remain 'bound' internally and is thus understood as erotogenic masochism and as such is *not* the result of sadism. But Deleuze maintained that one instinct is never directly transformed into another.

Even in his own time Freud had conceded that no truly satisfactory explanation had yet been advanced to explain masochistic tendencies and that a number of impulses may be involved. However, this concession does not stop him then going on to venture that the "remarkable feature" of such 'perversions' is that those who enjoy sadistic satisfaction also enjoy masochistic pleasures, that is, that there is an ability to be both active and passive in 'perverse' sexual relations[27].

> A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity.[28]

Indeed Freud made a number of attempts to understand masochism. When he first wrote on the subject he found it a particularly perverse practice because of the way it apparently contradicted his ideas with regard to the Pleasure Principle. The Pleasure Principle, was originally based upon the idea that any

organism had a 'natural' predilection to avoid excessive stimulus of any sort, preferring to protect itself from unnecessary 'energies' and thus keep tension as low as possible (the "principle of constancy")[29]. These ideas were based upon Freud's observations that all organisms have a layer or shield that acts to protect and differentiate the organism from its surrounding environment. This layer also gathers information from the environment that helps determine appropriate reaction, but Freud argued that any excessive stimulation (for instance that associated with the experience of masochistically induced pain) will necessarily be experienced as unpleasurable because it could be considered to work against the functioning of the organism.[30] However, Freud added that the Reality Principle, of necessity modified this desire for relative stasis; in order to cope with the environment the organism's desire to avoid stimulus and effect a state of complete relaxation, was just not possible. In order to survive a threshold of stimulation is needed to keep the organism interacting rather than lapsing into complete inertia. Masochism effectively disrupts and investigates the nature of this threshold in a way Freud understood to be pathological.

Fort /Da and Personal Empowerment

However, in subsequently writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud observed that un-pleasure may be deliberately sought as a means to resolving certain fundamental conflicts. For instance in Freud's example he examines how a child resolves his lack of control over the one he most depends upon by playing a game of his own creation Fort-Da. (Gone - There) in which the child deliberately slings a plaything over the side of his cot, exclaiming "Fort" and

then hauls the object back, greeting it's return with the word "Da"[31]. In this way, the unpleasantness of the loss is in some way compensated for by the control inherent in being able to make the object reappear and disappear at will. That is, painful circumstances (in this case separation from a loved object) may be deliberately entered into so that a sense of mastery over these circumstances may be achieved through an active manipulation of events (retrieval of loved object / dismissal of loved object). In this way the child's actions are used as a means of achieving psychological mastery over events that are understood to be essentially beyond his control. I am suggesting that this sense of mastery may be a source of empowerment. Freud's observations are useful to my argument because he provides a case study that gives weight to the notion that masochism may be used to gain a sense of personal empowerment. I will pursue this deliberate use of masochism, but I will relate it to certain forms of performance practice in order to argue that masochistic performance may also be used to achieve empowerment in a more public context, but the psychological mechanism in operation may be similar to that of the boy Freud observed. That is, performers use the conditions of a public performance to allow the spectator to witness how the limiting or 'painful' circumstances of his or her social, physical and/or political situation may be manipulated (Fort) and recouped (Da) so that the performers become the ones that are seen to be in control or empowered by their masochistic enactment. That performing masochism is akin to performing Fort / Da - a deliberate controlling of loss. The political efficacy of these actions may be seen in the direct effect made on public perception of the sorts of issues posed by these apparently transgressive actions. As I will argue in the following chapters, these issues are concerned with patriarchal discourses of power surrounding gendered identity,

the flesh-body at the pivot of technological change, and socio-political alienation in post-industrial society.

Masochism and the Pleasure Principle

Later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud goes on to suggest that as well as receiving stimuli from the external world there are impulses experienced as coming from within the organism, and that although the organism may have coarsened outer layers that reduce and limit the effect from the outside world, there is no such protective mechanism employed to control impulses generated from *within* the organism. Freud argues that this absence results in two things. Firstly, that feelings of pleasure or unpleasure coming from within the organism outweigh any stimulus coming from without. That is, the internal interpretative environment will override anything imposed from beyond the organism so that both pleasure and unpleasure become subjective phenomenon. In this way it could be argued that internal forces may override our acculturated understanding of what pleasure and unpleasure are. Secondly, any stimulus coming from within the organism that is considered to be too disruptive or unpleasurable tends to be understood to be coming from the external environment and initiates a shielding effect as a defence for the organism. Freud terms this effect *"projection"* and understands it to play a considerable role in psychological pathology[32]. That is, the organism defends itself from internal disruption by behaving as if the location of disorder lies beyond the self, exempting the self from examining and dealing with the source of disturbance. In this way, Freud was able to interpret the self-destructive impulses he aligned with masochism as actually arising from the individual in question, so that through the means of *projection* the masochist may develop a

relationship with a sadist or at least with someone with sadistic tendencies. However, as I will subsequently argue, the 'true' masochist is *not* bent on self-annihilation but explores states close to this in something akin to what Leo Bersani terms "psychic shattering", while a 'true' sadist, as Deleuze argues, would not accept a masochist as their victim[33].

In fact Deleuze disagrees with any attempt to cohere sadism and masochism as complementary 'syndromes' in spite of their shared concerns with the infliction and the experiencing of pain. He sees this tendency in psychoanalytic writing as evidence of a failure to apply disciplined reasoning to what he considers to be their distinct and separate characters. Deleuze goes on to support his position by referring to de Sade's *Justine* :

> A genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim (one of the monks' victims in Justine explains: 'They wish to be certain their crimes cost tears; they would send away any girl who was to come here voluntarily.')[34]

He goes on to point out that the need for the masochist to "educate" their torturer would also preclude "a truly sadistic torturer"[35]. Deleuze argues that Freud's conception of the inter-relatedness of sadism and masochism is flawed. Freud understood the manifestation of sadism and masochism as the operation of opposing instincts and drives within the same individual, suggesting that "a sadist is always at the same time a masochist" and that the sadist links pain with pleasure because of their own previous experience of pain as pleasure[36]. Deleuze found this assertion to be peculiar given that Freud had proposed that sadistic impulses always occur prior to masochistic ones.

> The fact that two organs are *analogous* need not mean that there is an evolutionary link between them. We should avoid falling into 'evolutionism' by aligning in a single chain results which are approximately continuous but which imply irreducible

> and heterogeneous formations. An eye, for example, could be produced in several independent ways, as the outcome of different sequences, the analogous product of completely different mechanisms.[37]

Deleuze warns against the tendency amongst psychoanalysts to try to create an integral whole from the parallels that can be drawn between masochism and sadism, that is, from the tendency to try to account for these 'syndromes' in terms of a transformation of Instincts as previously discussed. He instead recommends that the 'gaps' created by our lack of understanding be acknowledged and maintained so that further investigations may continue. I agree with Deleuze that it is necessary to accept that our understanding of both sadism and masochism is partial and incomplete, that they are not readily reversible 'syndromes', and that by avoiding interpretative closure, knowledge may be extended. I wish to supplement this quest by suggesting that the presence of masochistic tendencies in performance art may be a further investigation of the relation between sadism and masochism, one that opens the question of their interdependency and simultaneously explores alternative presentations or representations of subjectivity and the body.

Punishment and the Paternal Figure

In 1924 Freud appended his original thoughts following findings which he discusses in *A Child Is Being Beaten* (1919) and *The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1924). *A Child Is Being Beaten* (1919) is a paper based upon the case studies of 6 individuals (4 female and 2 male). The paper emphasises the importance of early childhood experiences, that is, experiences the individual had before the age of 5 or 6 years. Freud points out that later experiences are no less important but that the patient is more readily able to access these more

recent experiences without the aid of psychoanalysis, that is, that later experiences are more accessible as memories than those of a 2-4/5 year old. Freud's paper records a recurring fantasy of being beaten that Freud understands to be symptomatic of masochism. This is in part because a number of his patients share a similarly structured fantasy. Freud divides the beating fantasy into three phases, suggesting that the nature and content of these fantasies changes during the early period in which they occur. Phase one consists of the observation "My father is beating the child", at this stage the child being beaten is interpreted as a rival sibling, hence the development of "My father is beating the child whom I hate"[38]. During the second phase a transformation is thought to occur whereby the father remains the beater but the child becomes the one producing the fantasy and the "phantasy is accompanied by a high degree of pleasure, and has now acquired a significant content".[39] At this stage Freud considers the fantasy to be masochistic. Freud suggests that this occurs as a result of guilt feelings arising from the animosity directed towards the rival, and that the child places himself in the position of the beaten as atonement. Guilt thereby becomes the chief determining factor in the transformation of a sadistic impulse into a masochistic one. However, he goes on to say that guilt cannot be responsible for the whole story, that "a share must fall to the love-impulse".[40] That is, that as a result of the child's genital repression, itself a result of unconscious incestuous love, the child develops guilt for the forbidden desire to have the physical love of the father. The beating is the punishment resulting from this guilt, but also a substitute for the sexual activity itself.

During the third phase the fantasy changes character again. In the third phase the father figure may become a teacher who is beating a child (usually a boy)

while other children watch. "A child is being beaten and I am probably looking on"[41]. Sexual excitement is now strongly linked with the fantasy, something Freud finds bewildering:

> By what path has the phantasy of strange and unknown boys being beaten (a phantasy which has by this time become sadistic) found its way into the permanent possession of the little girls' libidinal trends?[42]

He argues that although the form of the third phase seems a return to the sadism of the first phase, the satisfaction experienced is actually masochistic, because the child being beaten is still just a substitute for the subject themselves.[43] In this version, guilt again is pivotal in the transformation of sadism into masochism.[44] So masochism arises from the guilt associated with incestuous desire. The subject desires the love of the father, experiences guilt as a result of this desire, and desires punishment as its substitute. All of this is seen as a transformation from sadism to masochism because it is seen from the outside as witnessing punishment, wishing for it, and then entering into the position of the object by identification.

Freud further notes that in cases of male masochism, instead of the male child being beaten being substituted by a female child, as might be expected, the male child remains. However, the father figure is replaced by the mother substitute and therefore in male masochism the male is from the start passively positioned. This is interpreted by Freud as being the result of "a feminine attitude towards the father", that is, that the child has an incestuous desire for the father but avoids assuming a homosexual position by the mother-for-father substitution.[45] The switch of the figure of power from male (father) to female (mother) can be seen as a heterosexual diversion - to avoid acknowledging a homosexual impulse. This explanation attempts to provide some understanding

of the processes of certain forms of masochism but it fails to acknowledge or even consider that the masochist may be demonstrating a personal form of agency through their fantasies that allows them to mentally manipulate and play with traditional orders and structures of patriarchal power that has the 'Father' as the central authority. My thesis is concerned with an interpretation of masochism enacted through performance that will demonstrate how this power play is possible. So, instead of the masochist being understood as 'patients' of psychosexual investigations, as they were during Freud's time, it will become clear that the masochistic performer uses their personal experience of masochism, enacted through performance in a way that may pose a significant political challenge. It is my intention to show how this challenge may be possible and to investigate the personal and socio-political efficacy of this play of power.

Feminine, Erotogenic and Moral Masochism

Freud made a further study of masochism that he published in 1924 *The Economic Problem of Masochism*. In this paper he gave particular attention to an anomaly he first noted in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, that is, he considered masochism in the light of the Pleasure Principle. He wrote:

> If pain and unpleasure can not be simply warnings but actually aims, the pleasure principle is paralysed - it is as though the watchman over our mental life were put out of action by a drug.[46]

That is, if the basis of the Pleasure Principle is, as I noted previously, a "principle of constancy" and that instead of pain being the body's reaction away from or a 'warning' against certain stimuli, it becomes the body's 'aim', the principle proves itself inadequate in accounting for all circumstances. It is this

inadequacy that Freud attempts to remedy by looking to Eros (life and erotic instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct). What Freud does is suggest that rather than conflating the death instinct (or Nirvana principle) with it's desire for continuity and relaxation, with the Pleasure Principle, which would seem to have similar aims, he wished these two principles to be addressed as separate entities. Freud, as I have already indicated, differentiates the two by stressing the libidinal concerns of the Pleasure Principle and the way in which both were modulated by the Reality Principle (or the external world).[47] Freud goes on to distinguish three forms of masochism, the feminine, the erotogenic and moral masochism.[48] Masochism as sadism "turned around upon the self", is linked with feminine and moral masochism.[49]

Erotogenic masochism with its "pleasure in pain" he finds hardest to justify and implies that there may be "biological and constitutional" factors that must be investigated before it becomes clear what motivates such masochism.[50] Freud discusses the instincts on a cellular level, describing how the death instinct impels the organism towards destruction in an attempt to gain the stability of becoming lifeless matter, whereas, Freud argues, the libido is there to try to counteract the compulsion to self-destruction and render it harmless. The libido apparently achieves this through a projection of the destructive impulse, via muscles and limbs, outwards towards the world beyond the organism. This is known as "the will to power" or mastery.[51] Part of this libidinal energy is focused upon the sexual purpose that Freud believes is the source of sadism. Another part remains within the organism bound libidinally, and it is this portion that Freud considers to be the "original, erotogenic masochism".[52] In addition, Freud notes that sometimes the destructive impulse instead of being projected outwards does become projected inwards. Freud understands these conditions

to account for secondary masochism, i.e. feminine and moral masochism. In this way Freud surmises that erotogenic masochism follows all the libido phases of development.

> The fear of being eaten up by the totem animal (the father) originates from the primitive oral organisation; the wish to be beaten by the father comes from the sadistic-anal phase which follows it; castration, although it is later disavowed, enters into the content masochistic phantasies as a precipitate of the phallic stage of organisation; and from the final genital organisation there arise, of course, the situation of being copulated with and of giving birth , which are characteristic of femaleness.[53]

According to Freud, feminine masochism is, therefore, understood to be based upon the erotogenic. He considers it the least problematic and easiest to understand. He relates his interpretation of the feminine masochist as one who wants to be "gagged, bound, painfully beaten, whipped" and generally debased.[54] This effectively amounts to a wish to be treated like "a small and helpless, but particularly, like a naughty child"[55]. Aside from questioning whether any child could justifiably be treated in this manner, his comments have the effect of conflating the feminine with the infantile. His case studies of masochistic fantasy apparently corroborate his notion that what is revealed is a "characteristically female situation" of sexual submission[56]. That is, "being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby", or adopting the infantile position referred to above.[57]. Freud here conflates masochism with female submission, childishness and the 'natural' biological order of things. In this way masochism is made to seem a 'normal' part of femaleness and this is a cultural alignment that persists even today. My argument, however questions this conflation, suggesting instead that ideas related to what are 'natural' and 'normal' manifestations of gendered identity may be challenged by masochistic performance work. It does this by distinguishing between 'normal' or 'everyday' sexual masochism and 'everyday' sexual masochism deliberately critiqued in a

performance context, arguing that the former sanctioned masochism is often promoted by patriarchal society because this masochism maintains and indeed bolsters a sado-masochistic economy which I believe is fundamental to patriarchal power. Whereas within a performance context, such as the work of Karen Finley, dealt with in chapter 3, the power dynamics of 'everyday' masochism are exposed and played with, thus undermining and temporarily suspending patriarchal structures of power in a way that is both personally and politically efficacious.

Moral masochism, Freud's third designation, is superficially removed from the sexual nature of feminine and erotogenic masochism since in this form of masochism the punishment does not emanate from a loved one. Focus is instead upon the suffering of the individual regardless of whether pain is derived from a lover or a person of no especial significance.[58] Freud notes that, although it might be possible to account for moral masochism by the death instinct turned inwards, this would not take into account the connection that is made linguistically. That is, in using the term masochism to describe this condition, there must be some erotic connection because 'masochism' per se demands sexual pleasure as well as pain. Freud implies that there must be some means whereby the masochist is able to recoup what they have suffered or at least feel that they deserved what they got. He links this with what he calls an "unconscious" sense of guilt[59]. He connects this guilt with moral masochism. Many of his patients, although aware of conscious feelings of guilt, found it difficult to believe they were suffering from unconscious guilt or a "need for punishment"[60]. The ego's unconscious masochistic desire for punishment results from the ego's unknowing sensitivity to an "ultra-morality", thus masochistic behaviours apparently result from an unconscious failure to

achieve the super-ego's ideals.[61] Freud goes on to argue that conscience and morality require that the Oedipal complex is renounced whereas with moral masochism the Oedipal complex becomes re-sexualised and the way becomes open for a "regression from morality to the Oedipal complex" [62]. With this regression the individual may no longer exercise any sense of conscience because anything 'sinful' may be atoned for through punishment meted out by "the sadistic conscience [...] or by chastisement from the great parental power of Destiny"[63]. That is, the masochist deliberately carries out provocative actions in order to achieve / ensure punishment whatever the personal risk involved. Furthermore, Freud surmises that it is the cultural suppression of the destructive instincts like sadism that leads to feelings of guilt because the destructive impulse is forced inwards by conscience and the super-ego takes up this force and directs it against the ego. In this way Freud argues, the more a person suppresses their aggression towards another, the more they experience feelings of guilt and consequently the more severe their conscience becomes. Freud argues that rather than ethics determining instinct renunciations, it is in fact the renunciation of instinct that creates a sense of ethics and conscience and that this then requires more renunciations[64]. Hence moral masochism becomes, what Freud describes as, "a classical piece of evidence of fusion of instincts", that is, a combination of an impulse to external destruction with an impulse for self-destruction[65]. Later in this thesis these thoughts will be taken up when I examine the idea of renunciation and self-inflicted punishment in relation to the practice of religious asceticism and the attempt to repudiate the flesh body and instincts. I will go on to situate these ideas in relation to performers like Ron Athey, Kira O'Reilly, Franko B and Orlan who use parodic performance methodologies or iconography that I will argue deliberately invokes or appropriates the sorts of devices associated with

religious asceticism in Christianity. I will investigate and analyse the provocation implied by these works and question how these actions may be used to achieve personal and political efficacy when considered in a social and performance context.

The Role of Fantasy

Theodor Reik, a disciple of Freud, looked more extensively at masochistic phenomena. His contribution to this area, like Freud's, continues to influence contemporary interpretations of masochism. It was Reik who first drew attention to the shared and (what he considered to be) essential features of masochism. He provided a set of diagnostic criteria that he used to identify the masochist, which I will detail below, explaining how they are useful to the structuring of my argument.

Reik ultimately surmised that masochism is not "merely sadism turned against the ego" but rather sadism "turned upside down"[66]. A reversal occurs whereby the ego becomes the subject of sadistic "rages" as the "second best and the nearest object", but that this is achieved through fantasy[67]. Through the filtering and distancing device of fantasy, the masochist creates or imagines a scenario, which enables the masochist to experience the sadistic 'urge' vicariously. Through the mechanism of fantasy the masochist watches the pain, torture and humiliation of another, anticipating their own turn when they will replace the 'victim' viewed. Thus Reik, places *fantasy* as the central determining factor in masochism.

> Masochistic practices are but an acting out of preceding phantasies

> daydreams that are transferred into reality. Every thorough analysis shows that the masochistic perversion is a reproduction of previously imagined situations long familiar to the individual. In the beginning there is no action, as far as masochism is concerned, but the fantasy.[68]

The fantasy may take on a ritual aspect, which may be reinforced by the repetition of the fantasy on many occasions without significant change. As Reik suggests above, the masochist may choose to go as far as to physically act out their fantasies. Masochistic performers, however, do not necessarily engage in private enactments but instead require an audience to 'witness' events. This desire for 'witnesses' to their performances may be considered to have some correspondence to what Reik calls the *demonstrative feature*. I would argue that this figuring of the spectator as witness to such performances is of central importance to my thesis. I should at this point make an aesthetic distinction between the spectator *viewing* a performance and what I am calling a 'witness' to a performance. Firstly there is an aesthetic difference in terms of the use of the body in 'witnessed' performances, which may include a 'real' physical disruption of the body. Secondly, what happens to the 'witnessed' body is essentially non-repeatable, because the body reveals it's actuality - it's 'real' physical presence undergoing specific actions that are happening 'here and now'. And finally what is 'witnessed' occurs in a time frame that exactly corresponds with our (the audience's) own. There is no contraction or elongation of time's passage. Furthermore, according to Adrian Heathfield, the distinction between 'witness' and 'viewer' rests on the act of 'witnessing' being about the degree of complete immersion in what is occurring so that the "excessive power" of the event becomes something that will remain and recur in the memory of those who 'witness' because it is beyond the witness to assimilate all that is experienced during the time of the experience[69]. This is an

idea that I will explore in detail in a separate chapter that deals with the work of Ron Athey.

There are other features Reik considered essential for a masochistic 'diagnosis'. The second of these is the need to show one's humiliation, degradation and pain *to* others, although in the context of contemporary performance practices these may not be considered consistently recurring or essential features, humiliation, degradation and pain are elements that certainly at times occur within the performances I am designating as masochistic. Thirdly, Reik underlines the necessity of *suspense*, which he understands as a tension used to control anxiety, preventing release, a sense of waiting for something expected but postponed. This anxiety according to Reik, arises from 'end-pleasure' or climax, and therefore the masochist does everything in his/ her power "to prolong the fore-pleasure"[70]. However the desire to reach orgasm or fulfilment is just as great in the masochistic individual as in any, and fear of any retributive consequences for actions (sexual or otherwise) is just as real. In this way, according to Reik, the desire for the anticipated pleasure becomes intermingled and confused with the feelings of dread and fear, so that ultimately "Anxiety itself became an element of pleasure".[71] In this way it could be argued that the masochist actively seeks to control and experience the painful situation so that he/ she may be alleviated from suspense's anxiety and what is actually experienced as pleasurable is not the pain itself, but the anticipation of pain in what Reik calls "a flight toward the future"[72]. Within a performance context, 'suspense' may be deliberately induced to achieve very much the same ends, that is, the performer actively introduces but stalls the discomforting situation in order to make it happen according to his or her own stipulations, prolonging it as an enactment of their triumph over anxiety and

pain. In this respect the spectator, as witness, may experience a greater level of 'suspense' than the performer, because they are not as in 'control' of events. As I have mentioned I will consider this performer / witness relationship and how it contributes to the dynamics and social efficacy of a masochistic performance.

Finally Reik noted the use of provocation or the *provocative feature* used to ensure one's wishes were carried out, that is, the demand that he / she be punished in order to enjoy the pleasure hitherto prohibited. Through the masochist's deliberate submission to punishment, exacted through the provocation / persuasion of the torturer, he / she is able to "purchase[d] the right" to pleasure previously forbidden[73].

Reik's framing of masochism becomes useful to my argument because of the way it draws attention to the manner in which political resistance to patriarchy may be offered up through the use of a masochistic reversal or as Reik puts it, by achieving a "victory through defeat"[74]. That is, the masochist in anticipating and reversing the order of gratification and punishment manages to ridicule and suspend the (paternal / patriarchal) authority used to control him / herself. In this way the masochist:

> Spitefully demonstrates that all inhibitive measures of education and culture are condemned to failure since he only pretends submission but never really submits in spirit.[75]

Submission in masochism is a kind of victory in defeat since it is never a submission of spirit. The masochist in following through his / her inverse logic demonstrates through ridicule and suspension a resistance to retributive patriarchal 'law' that is fundamental to my argument. In a performance context

the work of the masochistic performer shows the audience how it is possible to offer, through the body, a form of personal resistance. This is because the body remains at once our own property while at the same time being an acculturated subject of the social body to which the audience also belongs. The masochist in 'reversing' disciplinary laws concerned with 'cause' and 'effect' or 'crime' and 'retribution' that apply to themselves as well as to the audience, reveals how it is possible to disregard the spirit of the 'law' by concerning oneself with the 'letter' of the law. This performance choice has political efficacy because it shows the audience that it is possible to play with the boundaries of the law in a way that maintains the law's logic but reveals the potential of masochism to subversively undermine the law. This potential may be exploited by the masochist performer to reveal the ability of alternative, often disenfranchised subjectivities, to pose questions and challenges to the audience about the nature, function and security of hegemonic power structures.

Although I acknowledge and will try to avoid the danger of conflating masochistic psychoanalytic theory with masochistic performance practice, I will argue that Reik's framing of masochism may be usefully considered in relation to an analysis of masochistic performance because of the emphasis he places on the role of fantasy and his understanding that the other masochistic factors described previously evolve as a result of fantasy. That is, I wish to connect Reik's idea of fantasy - a quality fundamental to sexual masochism, with the imaginative capacity at the root of the creative process because both processes require the mental manipulation of, as yet, unrealised events or actions for the subject's own purposes or desires. Consequently it is possible to

make an oblique connection between the imaginative capacity or fantasy and the creative process utilised in performance.

Masochistic 'Suspension' and the concept of Resurrection

Reik also makes some interesting suppositions in relation to religion and masochism. He surmises that the Christian idea of resurrection and salvation may operate on basically masochistic principles. That is, that the idea of resurrection and salvation is based on the premise that pleasure / gratification is deferred beyond the usual space / time limitations of the transient flesh body otherwise known as earthly existence, to the afterlife of heaven. The pain and suffering endured during life as a Christian is set against the rewards and pleasures believed to be gained in life beyond death. Thus, Christian faith may be considered a resistance against the time-bound limits of the physical body. By the same logic, those individuals or communities that suffer the most in the name of God, come to be understood as those singled out by God as the Chosen ones, believing that at some indeterminate future time these people will enjoy God's especial favour for their endurance. So no matter what or how great the oppression or degradation experienced, they can be sure that they will ultimately triumph. Reik writes:

> The last will be first according to the anticipating imagination. Ignominy and abuse will be turned into fame and honor.[76]

Compensation is thus assured for those with a committed and steadfast faith. That is, 'pleasure' will, in the end, be achieved. It might thus be argued that the pursuit of pleasure or Freud's Pleasure Principle remains at the base of the masochistic urge too, even when pleasure may be deferred or suspended

indefinitely. The masochistic base of religious belief will be carried through in my discussion of Ron Athey's work in Chapter 4.

Literary Masochism and the Maternal

More recent conceptions of masochism, like that expounded by Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* were derived, as I mentioned initially, from his interpretation of the literary work of Sacher Masoch particularly *Venus in Furs*[77]. Deleuze was the first to re-orientate the notion of masochism towards its original literary derivative. Deleuze suggests that rather than using a 'prejudiced' psychoanalytic approach to an interpretation of masochism and sadism, it would be more fruitful to take a literary approach as it is from the literature of Sade and Masoch that the clinical definition arises.[78]

Deleuze supports his argument by drawing attention to where Masoch's work appears to show signs of having been influenced by Plato, drawing parallels between Plato's supposition that Socrates was actually the *receiver* of love while the impression is given that he was the lover, that is, the *giver* of love[79]. Deleuze sees this type of reversal mirrored in masochism where:

> The masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her, [...] It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself.[80]

Deleuze questioned Freud's seemingly automatic assumption that the powerful figure present in masochistic fantasy must always refer back to the father. Instead, Deleuze notes the predominance of powerful female figures in Masoch's literary work. These works appear to contain three female types that

Deleuze aligns with three mother types. The primitive, uterine mother; the Oedipal mother; and the oral, nurturing mother who bears the prescience of death and is here specifically connected to masochism by Deleuze through "the ideal of coldness, solicitude and death".[81] Deleuze rejects psychoanalytic interpretations that insist that it is the father-image in disguise that is behind the mother/ woman wielding the whip in masochistic fantasy. Deleuze, for instance, believes that there is a lack of specificity in Reik's psychoanalytic observations with regard to statements concerning the father as "hidden" behind the image of the mother / torturer.[82] Deleuze refutes Reik's position on the father as an "essential and constant" part of the aetiology of masochism implying that there is no 'real' evidence to suggest that the figure of the father must necessarily substitute for the mother[83]. In other words, Deleuze maintains that it is the mother-image rather than the father-image that is central to masochistic fantasy, and that in contrast to sadism's degradation and abuse of the mother / women, it is the father that is expelled from the masochistic world. Deleuze surmises that while the father-image is excluded and replaced with the mother-image, the mother then takes on the role and responsibility of "paternal law"[84]. But whereas, with the father-image, this power would 'normally' result in the threat of the son's castration ensuring the prevention of incest, with the mother-image the reverse holds true. That is, the son's castration becomes necessary for 'incest' or his 'second birth' to occur. The threat of castration, instead of symbolising the son's repression and exclusion signifies his 'success' at achieving re-birth without the paternal order. This idea of the son attempting to subvert paternal law will be subsequently considered in relation to the masochistic performance work of Ron Athey and Franko B.

As Masoch's work contains a number of hunts, Deleuze stresses the significance of these shared events as part of a mechanism designed to initiate re-birth.[85] That is, by the son's possession of the uterine mother and the sacrifice of the Oedipal mother, he is able, by the process of parthenogenesis to be re-born. Deleuze sees this signified in the:

> Marriage of vine and maize [...] the plough representing union with the mother; the pinpricking and the whipping.[86]

That is, the son is reborn with the help of the oral mother who has become the "mistress of the Law" combining the features of the expelled mothers to achieve "the common essence of agriculture, matriarchy and rebirth"[87]. In this way, Deleuze argues that the son becomes a 'new man' through the mother, who has chastised him in order to remove all traces of the father's likeness from him.

> The masochist practices three forms of disavowal at once: the first magnifies the mother, by attributing to her the phallus instrumental to rebirth; the second excludes the father since he has no part in this rebirth; and the third relates to sexual pleasure, which is interrupted, deprived of its genitality and transformed into the pleasure of being reborn.[88]

Disavowal, and the imagination that is fundamental to its operation because of the way in which it suspends the real world in favour of the ideal, becomes the means whereby the oral mother comes to possess a maternal phallus with its inherent powers. It is via the maternal phallus that the son is able to achieve the aforementioned 'rebirth' in a way that places him outside the paternal order of patriarchal society. Deleuze comes to agree with Reik's contention that fantasy, based as it is upon the power of imagination, is the primary force in masochism.[89] But it must be noted that whereas in cases of masochism

presented for psychoanalysis the fantasy may exist as pure fiction, in a performance context fantasy is enacted and takes up a concrete reality. Later in this thesis I will investigate how the work of individual performers like Ron Athey and Karen Finley may embody, exceed or dismiss the idea of fantasy as a fundamental feature of their performance work and articulate how this does or doesn't work as a process of 'rebirth' for them and / or a reversal of paternal order.

Fantasy and "Freezing"

As I have suggested Deleuze argues that Masoch's writing disavows the reality of the world through an engagement with fantasy. This "escape into the world of dreams" is implemented in order to achieve a suspension that matches his "ideal reality".[90] For the masochist, the suspended or frozen moment may constitute a postponement of sexual pleasure, that is, through the process of disavowal, pleasure is denied. Deleuze describes the "photographic" quality of scenes in Masoch's *Venus in Furs* where the writer deliberately uses descriptions that have the torturer still or suspend certain of her actions at crucial and provocative moments, thus temporarily prolonging them and compounding unresolved sexual tension by "freezing" it. As Deleuze interprets Masoch, the references to coldness, ice and frozen objects in *Venus in Furs* stress Masoch's desire to emphasise the impact the Ice Age had upon the Grecian world.[91] To Deleuze it would seem that Masoch takes this phenomenon to have been responsible for certain transformations in human relations and consciousness.

> Sentimentality became the object of man's thought, and cruelty the

> punishment for his coarseness. In the coldhearted alliance between man and woman, it is this cruelty and sentimentality in woman that compel man to thought and properly constitute the masochistic ideal.[92]

In this way masochism figures a female torturer attempting to achieve a "cruelty of the Ideal".[93] When this Ideal is obtained, she "freezes" the action.

Furthermore, Deleuze emphasises waiting or suspension as an intrinsic aspect of masochism, making a distinction between that which is waited for, but remains overdue or postponed, and that which is expected and crucial to "the speeding up of the awaited object".[94] Following this logic, pain becomes the expected and necessary prerequisite / co-requisite to the "awaited object", which is pleasure. In this way pain becomes the condition by which pleasure may be guaranteed and corresponds with Reik's idea of 'purchasing' forbidden pleasure through a debt; a debt paid through the body. However, this use of the body to pay a debt *in advance* is a disruption of our traditional understanding of cause and effect or crime and retribution as I have discussed in relation to Reik. That is, the subject essentially pleads guilty and accepts retribution, in order to then be 'justified' in carrying out their 'crime'. The 'crime' often being concerned with exacting some sort of 'illicit' sexual pleasure. This, as I previously surmised, effectively turns the idea of the law on its head. In the context of alternative subjectivity where the means of gaining sexual pleasure may be considered outside the socially or legally prescribed law, punishment enacted upon the body in effect allows for the sanctioning of any subsequent sexual or sensual activity. Punishment thus signifies a personally efficacious means of gaining license to carry out activities that are regarded censoriously under patriarchal 'law'. Within a performance context, the masochistic performer moves what is personally efficacious into a social setting and in the process of public enactment reveals the political efficacy of masochism in exposing the instabilities or gaps inherent in the operation of the 'law'. These

instabilities may be used to question and/ or subvert rationalist assumptions like that demonstrated by the 'law' that makes a linear connection between 'cause' (in this case the 'crime') and 'effect' (the punishment). During the course of this thesis I will explore the nature and function of these masochistic induced instabilities and determine their cultural resonance particularly in the work of Karen Finley , Franko B and Orlan.

The Contract and the Law

Deleuze notes that it is the masochist who actively seeks out suitable candidates to be "educated" in masochistic matters so that they may then take on the mantle of torturer. He indicates the importance of advertising to obtain colluding individuals and the subsequent importance of the contract in delineating a 'law' of masochistic practices. [95] It is the contractual nature of masochism that Deleuze sees lacking in Reik's understanding of masochism, that is, the contract between torturer and the tortured. Moreover, Deleuze stresses the point that this contract is determined and put in place by the victims themselves.

> The masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone. The masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer.[96]

Deleuze outlines the particular qualities of the contract as being:

> In principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period.[97]

He contrasts the idea of the law with the operations of the Institution.

Institutional power is interpreted by Deleuze as that which may "render laws

unnecessary"[98], a system based upon established long-term authority that is not freely open to negotiation.

> Pure institutions without laws would by definition be models of free, anarchic action, in perpetual motion, in permanent revolution, in a constant state of immorality.[99]

Deleuze aligns institutional power with sadistic power whereas masochistic power is seen to be subject to law. He argues that a completed contract effectively constitutes a law. This is important because Deleuze then goes on to demonstrate how the writers Sade and Masoch effectively "turn[ing] the law upside down".[100] Sade seeks to fight against what he sees as a system of laws that are in effect a tyranny and allows tyrants to rise to power.

> The tyrant speaks the language of the law, and acknowledges no other, for he lives 'in the shadow of the laws'.[101]

So rather than looking to the Platonic principle of superior good upon which the law is supposedly founded, the sadist subverts the law by turning to "the Idea of Evil"[102], thus looking to form an "institutional model of anarchy"[103]. By contrast the masochist presents an alternative means of subverting the law, that is, by his or her absolute submission to the word of the law the masochist draws attention to the law's absurdity and inadequacies. Deleuze writes

> The masochist regards the law as a punitive process and therefore begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he has undergone the punishment, he feels that he is allowed or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid.[104]

So instead of the law controlling what is allowed or forbidden the masochist is here seen to play by the rule of the law to achieve his or her own ends through a cunning reversal. Punishment becomes a prerequisite rather than a

retributive action and as Deleuze suggests, the humour of such law-abiding law-breaking becomes apparent.

> The masochist is insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short he is a humorist a logician of consequences, just as the ironic sadist is a logician of principles.[105]

Deleuze's conception of the masochist as inherently humorous is one that I believe masochism in performance may utilise to stress the irony inherent in the blind obedience of the 'docile body' to certain stipulations of the law. I will further explore this notion in relation to the performance work of Karen Finley and Orlan and their very different approaches to critiquing the acculturated appearance and behaviour of the female body. Additionally what the 'masochist as humorist' may uncover is the very *limitations* of the law in relation to the subject. The idea that masochistic practices may be used in performance to reveal that there may be limits to or at least temporary ruptures possible in the operation of patriarchal law on contemporary subjectivity, is one that remains central to the concerns of this thesis.

The Masochistic Contract and Patriarchal Power Relations

> A contract is drawn up between the subject and the torturess, giving a new application to the idea of the jurists of antiquity that slavery itself is based on a contract.[106]

This literal contract, as we have seen emphasised in Deleuze's work on masochism, refers to the actual (i.e. written) or metaphorical establishment of a mutual understanding between participants in masochistic actions. Originally this referred to an agreement between sexual partners, but when applied to performance in a less literal sense the construct may be extended to the

performer/performer or performer / audience relationship. As I have already mentioned Deleuze interprets the masochistic contract as a sort of parody of the law because of the way in which a reversal of patriarchal power relations would seem to transfer power from the male subject to the (hypothetical) female, or from the Freudian father figure to the cold, oral mother. Deleuze believed that this reversal was a means whereby the authority of the phallus was passed to the mother in all her harsh and comforting manifestations:

> The trinity of the masochistic dream is summed up in the words: cold - maternal - severe, icy - sentimental - cruel [...] The coldness is both protective milieu and medium, cocoon and vehicle: it protects supersensual sentimentality as inner life and expresses it as external order, as wrath and severity. [107]

As I have already noted Deleuze suggests that patriarchal power could, in this way, be superseded and thus removed "from the masochistic universe"[108].

However, as Nick Mansfield noted in his book *Masochism: The Art of Power*, this reversal is simply that, a contradiction of Freud that does not go much further than replacing the father with the mother without offering any further explanation, just a re-inscription of the same power masquerading as difference. Deleuze argues that the apparent power of the dominatrix, according to the contract, is entirely under the control of the male masochist, who has generated this situation for his own purposes. That is, Deleuze argues that it is a means whereby the masochist comes to own and control femininity - the oral mother. Her demonstrated autonomy is entirely fictional, a product of his fantasy. The apparent powerlessness of the masochist in undergoing these agonies fails to take into account who is the controlling party in all these proceedings. It is not the viewer, placed in the pseudo-sadist position, but the masochist who determines the nature and limits of any actions. Superficially there appears to be a destruction of paternal power because the male

masochist is physically and mentally abused by the female dominatrix, however this apparent 'destruction' is revealed as a sham because the whole scenario is a result of male authority.

Like Mansfield, I acknowledge that Deleuze's theorising was effectively responsible for altering contemporary understandings of masochism. So rather than masochism being understood as a psychosexual 'perverse' practice it could be understood as a significant dynamic of socio-cultural life that has found expression in literature. By extension I wish to push some of Deleuze's ideas beyond their cultural and literary positioning to a consideration of their political import. Particularly the political efficacy of masochistic performance practices that effect a number of parodic reversals of power relations that include a consideration of the subversive potential of masochistic humour and the masochistic contract with its relation to patriarchal law. In particular I will address these issues in relation to the work of Ron Athey and Karen Finley.

In addition I will expand the ideas of Mansfield into the context of masochistic performance practice because, unlike Deleuze, Mansfield is not so much concerned with the unfolding familial relations and their psychosexual dynamics as he is with masochism as a manifestation of reconstructed power expressed between individuals, culminating in the idea of the "total subject".

The 'Total Subject'

> The masochistic subject includes its own object within it - repeating, imagining, creating and destroying, even being it. The object is always both interior and exterior to the subject - completely under control, but only by way of its own independent authority.[109]

This seemingly impossible and paradoxical ontology is, according to Mansfield, part of the masochist's whole effort to achieve a point where there are no binary oppositions but indifference between such traditional polarities as pain and pleasure, power and powerlessness, masculine and feminine. In this way he becomes his own other, his own object of desire - the total subject.

> This subjectivity represents the highest aspiration of the masochistic subject - the subject to whom every apotheosis and abasement is always available; to whom there are no alternatives - who can operate power while remaining technically removed from it, even critical of it, who is, in short, capable of (being) anything.[110]

This sort of subjectivity plays with the structure of polarities, exchanging positions between 'oppositions' in a dynamic pursuit of desire. I will argue, particularly in relation to Ron Athey and Karen Finley, that it is this 'blurring' of the limits and responsibilities of subjectivity that makes masochism abhorrent to patriarchal powers that order and control through the perpetuation of clear cut binary oppositions and relatively fixed notions of personhood.

Mansfield's own work can be used to extend Deleuze's argument, so that those formerly understood to be suffering from a pathological condition that placed them as victims of their own uncontrollable behaviours, are transformed into powerful subjects exercising an individual agency that challenges aspects of patriarchal authority. One of these aspects that Mansfield is concerned with, is that previous theories of masochism only ever expressed its dynamics in terms of the polarities of pain and pleasure.[111] What Mansfield suggests is that there can not be such a rigid separation between these apparently opposed sensations. This suggestion is important to my argument because it points towards an interpretation of masochism that challenges a patriarchal system that still remains imbedded in a hierarchy of binary oppositions.

> If pain is the thrilling anticipation of pleasure, it is already a locus of excitement and a kind of libidinal rush. In other words, if pain is the anticipation of pleasure, it already is pleasure [...] we must try to imagine the point where there is an indifference, a nondisjunction between these two states.[112]

He surmises that there is no clear division between these experiences and that a large proportion of our physical perception of pain and pleasure is dependent on how these bodily sensations have been culturally inscribed. This inscription occurs as part of the cultural construction of bodies, under a patriarchal system of power, that has a vested interest in the maintenance of clear boundaries that determine and rank pleasurable sensations above painful ones. This ensures control over the disciplined social subject who has supposedly learnt that correct (patriarchally determined) action results in 'pleasure' whereas incorrect (subversive) action will result in 'pain'. By extension, the challenge presented by a questioning of pain and pleasure as culturally determined oppositions may have the effect of drawing attention to other binaries still operating to maintain patriarchal structures. For instance, the privileging of the masculine over the feminine, the healthy over the sick, the 'beautiful' over the 'ugly', and the mind over the flesh body. I will consider how masochism enacted through performance may be used to bring together 'pain' / 'pleasure' sensations traditionally considered polarities in order to examine how such actions may be socio-politically interpreted as a subversion of patriarchally determined binary authority. By using masochism in performance to question one traditionally accepted binary, it may be possible to place other such binaries under scrutiny, highlighting their arbitrary nature and the potential for a 'blurring' or an overlap of these categories. In the realisation of masochistic performance that 'blurs' the binaries that I have argued are fundamental to patriarchal authority, a socio-political efficacy may be enacted that works by drawing spectator

attention to the asymmetry in power that is both inherent in, and perpetuated by, binary structures.

Masochism and the Performance Contract

The idea of applying the notion of the 'contract' to masochistic performance work is Kathy O'Dell's, who developed this thesis in her book *Contract with the Skin: Masochism in Performance Art in the 1970s* (1998), one of the first books to directly draw together the concept of masochism with performance. O'Dell draws upon Deleuze's idea of the masochistic contract and the non-literal contract between audience member and performer, which may be considered a tacit agreement to behave within the performance space in certain prescribed ways. O'Dell suggests that it is too easy to surmise that masochistic performance during the 1970s was a direct reaction to socio-political events like the Vietnam war. Instead O'Dell suggests that the actions of masochistic artists were more likely to be indicative of a desire to look to the socio-psychological roots of alienation. This contrasts with the stated function of other contemporary performance that wished to use performance as a political tool designed to provoke popular reaction and promote anti-war rhetoric. Instead O'Dell attempts to highlight the connections that can be drawn between the use of pain in performance and various disturbances in institutional structures.

> Artists of this era saw problems in the oppressive framework that shaped their lives as artists and citizens - problems that ran far deeper and were more complicated than previously thought [...] as Deleuze rightly argues, masochism always embodies a critique. Masochism blows the whistle on institutional frameworks that trigger it and within which it is practiced.[113]

O'Dell saw these institutions, specifically the law and the home, as having the contract as a shared facet that was fundamental to their existence. According to O'Dell, contract law theory during the 1970s was revised in order to clarify '"meant-said' distinctions", that is, more weight was given to what was actually meant rather than what was said[114]. This was an attempt to privilege meaning over the apparently more abstract word of the law. O'Dell saw these legal changes in part as a reaction to what she saw as the disparities between the official representation of America's intervention in the Vietnam war or "what was said" and what actually took place as a result of those interventions or "what was meant".

> The gap between 'what was said' by those in power and 'what was meant' grew wider and wider [...] In this sense, any individual's repudiation of the war may be seen as a response to political leaders' exploitation of the century-old pattern in contract law of privileging what is said (the signifier) over what is meant (the referent) in such a way that the latter simply disappears as it is merged ideologically with the former.[115]

O'Dell suggests that artists, instead of operating "in the gap between what was said and what was meant" were actually using a suffering painful finger "to point to it [the gap] and offer a critique"[116]. That is, of using masochism metaphorically to express the difficulty in dealing with this 'split'. For example, Chris Burden, the infamous artist who had himself shot in the arm by an accomplice (*Shoot*, 1971), focused viewers attention on violence and the fragility of human flesh. It may be argued that Burden's work was in part an attempt to expose the unspoken contract that had allowed for cultural and political inertia in the face of extreme events of the Vietnam War. However, it is an arguably more accurate interpretation of this work to suggest that he was endeavouring to draw attention to an apparent collapse of art and life by confusing the boundaries between representation and reality. That is, the bullet

really passed through his arm, the blood was warm, red and wet, the shock and pain were his. In spite of being a contrived event, it was still a physical reality. The masochist is, by definition, the consensual contractual participant in violence and it is this that distinguishes him/her from the category of 'real' victim. The masochism used in this performance by Burden arguably drew attention to the 'gap' opened up between reality and illusion. Representation and the 'real' become conflated, so that through this conflation the relationship of each to the other was underscored and thrown into question. This opens up the question of how are we able to distinguish between the reality of Burden being shot ('the letter of the law') and Burden representing the action of being shot? ('the spirit of the law'), that is, Burden uses his body to illustrate what O'Dell calls the 'split' in "meant- said" distinctions. Thus demonstrating the ability of the law to be exercised according to the agenda of those in political authority [117].

However, the intentions of this work are fundamentally different from the performance work I will be investigating. That is, although O'Dell's analysis of masochism, interpreted through the work of artists like Burden, may share a concern with power disparities (i.e. victim /perpetrator), these disparities are not essentially to do with undermining masculine authority and power. Burden arguably confirmed and buttressed masculine power through his extreme performances. For instance, even Burden's decision to stage his own shooting as a performance already sets up a series of associations with the stereotypical North American male-orientated activity of shooting and hunting, or perhaps even with the heroic outlaw/rebel facing the firing squad. In addition the photographic record of Burden following the shooting reflects his still defiant, if shocked, expression. He never shows his vulnerability or woundedness, he

never relents from projecting a sense of his own indominability. In contrast to O'Dell, I am attempting to reveal that the masochistic body currently used in performance is much more concerned with issues relating to gender-based anxieties, the impact of technological change on the flesh body, and the search for spiritual renewal in response to socio-political alienation.

Masochism and Women

> Krafft-Ebing, observing that masochistic men often play the role of the suffering female, speaks of masochistic phenomena as representing a sort of rank outgrowth of female qualities, Freud, stating from the same observation, assumes a close connection between masochism and femininity; the Russian gynecologist Nemilov, being impressed by women's suffering in defloration, menstruation and childbirth, speaks of the 'bloody tragedy of woman', the German gynecologist Liepman, being impressed by the frequency of illnesses, accidents and pains in the life of women, assumes that vulnerability , irritability, and sensitivity are the fundamental triad of female qualities.[118]

According to Karen Horney in 'The Problem of Feminine Masochism', because women are understood as having a biological inheritance that forces them to endure the sort of suffering outlined above, they are virtually naturalised as inherently masochistic. The bias towards the privileging of the male over the female previously referred to in relation to the operation of binaries, has also meant that the theorists that I have so far concentrated on have been primarily concerned with an interpretation of masochism in men from a male perspective. As I mentioned earlier, this may in part be due to the fact that early writers on masochism such as Freud didn't pathologise masochism in the female to the extent that they did male manifestations of masochism because the female was understood as having a predilection for masochism anyway, by which I mean masochism, with its submissive quality, was seen as 'natural' and therefore did not require any particular psychoanalytic focus. In this next section I will

examine Reik's interpretations of women's supposedly masochistic destiny in order to contextualize the conventional conjunction of women with masochism. I will place these ideas in relation to my own argument and assertion that there is a power-countering potential in a female performer's use of masochism. An issue that I will pursue in a number of the following chapters.

Reik points out that it may be argued that women are to some extent socialised or 'educated' to accept their passive state and suffer 'biological' pain. He notes that others have indeed suggested that those women who do not manifest masochistic tendencies may be considered to be behaving in a manner contrary to their assigned gendered identity.

> Among the publications of female analysts, too, the opinion seems to prevail that the role attributed to woman by nature urge her to masochism. One gets almost the impression that a woman who does not incline to masochism is perverse, and must appear unwomanly.[119]

However, Reik disagrees that masochism is inherent in womanliness. He writes that it is quite possible to a woman to put up with certain situations that require the endurance of pain, but that this does not make them masochistic because "she does not strive for discomfort."[120] In effect Reik's emphasises the role played by socio-cultural factors in determining what Freud, and other analysts puts down to woman's 'nature'. I would argue that Reik is making an important assertion here by suggesting that for women acculturation towards tolerating situations where 'pain' is a factor carries more weight than any 'natural' predisposition towards masochism, that is, that women are not innately masochistic. Through this admission I would argue the female masochist may be understood to be exercising a choice, just like the male masochist.

However, Reik goes on to assert, in a manner that I would argue privileges the male masochist over the female masochist, that masochistic men are far more inclined towards 'perverse' forms of masochism than women and that fantasies of masochistic men tend to be far more extreme and orgiastic than women's. That is, male masochists' fantasies are characterised by a frenzied intensity, whereas women's apparently have more to do with yielding and surrender.[121]

He accounts for this difference by the contrasting levels of libido between men and women and draws attention to the sadistic origins of masochism that socialisation has suppressed to a greater degree in women than men. This 'lesser' sadism in women that Reik extrapolates as leading to a 'lesser' form of masochism is, according to Reik, due to women's lack of a penis[122]. By this I mean Reik suggests that although nearly all women are socialised towards masochism, those (relatively few) men who do show masochistic tendencies develop a more extreme form of masochism than women, and that this is due to the male masochist having a penis. Reik equates the penis with aggression, and because women lack the penis he believes they also lack the aggression and intense impulses that he believes characterise male sadistic behaviour. The male, according to Reik, has had to endure the suppression of Oedipal "constellations" to a far greater degree than the female. The superego of the female does not require the same rigor to control suppression that the male requires so aggression turned towards her ego is less.[123] Therefore, according to Reik, both physical and psychological differences between the sexes lies at the core of the difference in masochism's manifestation in men and women. I would argue that Reik's argument suggests that there is something inherently more 'valuable' in the masochistic male's apparently greater ability to experience extremes. Reik asserts this as a reflection of the greater idealism and romanticism of men in general when compared with what he considers to

be the rather pedestrian fantasies of women and the surmised inability of most women to reach for the heights or depths of sensation. According to Reik:

> This is because they [men] are ambitious while women in general are vain.[124]

I would take issue with Reik's conclusions, for although he appears to acknowledge that masochism is not 'natural' for women in the manner Freud theorised, an opinion that concurs with my argument that masochism when adopted, is a choice, he does maintain a binary-based understanding of 'power' and 'powerlessness'. By which I mean the 'power' of masochistic extremes is accorded the male fantasist and is valorised, in contrast to the 'powerlessness' of the female fantasist, whose fantasies are supposedly demeaning because they are concerned with reception. To receive is a quality tacitly assumed to be submissive when it is considered in relation to the body. This conflation of the feminine, reception and submission effectively rewrites the female masochist as essentially lacking agency. By contrast, I wish to assert that to receive is not necessarily to submit and that the cultural inscription of reception as both female and submissive may be questioned by masochistic enactment in performance. I will be arguing during the course of this thesis that performance artists Karen Finley, Marina Abramović, Kira O'Reilly and Orlan use masochism to expose the potential power of 'lack' and show how masochism may be used as an exercise of female agency. I use Karen Finley's work because it reveals the 'obscene' spectacle of sado-masochistic dynamics in contemporary gender relations in the United States, I use the work of Marina Abramović to provide a historical context for masochistic performance practices and to examine how masochism may exact a sense of spiritual renewal through attempts to release the ego from the constraints of subjectivity. Kira O'Reilly allows her body to be

penetrated by leeches who create a series of wounds reminiscent of religious stigmata, I interpret her work in order to show how masochism may be used as a means of gaining personal empowerment. Finally, I address the performance practices of Orlan whose work questions how the body may or may not be seen as the site of self and reveals the significance of socially-sanctioned forms of masochism in the formation of subjectivity. I will argue that the work of these artists substantiates my claim that masochism in performance may be used as a poignant means of publicly asserting a sense of personal agency and control, which may draw the audience's attention to the many limits placed upon what is a possible or 'acceptable' physical intervention for the female subject who has been acculturated under a patriarchal system.

Moreover, I will argue that masochism in performance may be used to subvert the 'sadistic' power often associated with the phallus and phallic power. That is, that masochistic performance may indirectly or directly draw attention to the idea that the extremes of sensation and sexual fulfilment may be exacted for men and women in a mutually 'pleasurable' experience gained without any male penile penetration because the entire body becomes a focus of sensation. This body may be closer to the polymorphously perverse infant described by Freud as an expression of immature sexuality, where pleasure may be derived from the body's whole surface and, according to Freud, should be relinquished in adulthood in favour of a penile sensibility. The masochist, in refusing to devote him or herself to 'mature' sexual behaviour continues to use the many surfaces and orifices of the body to reach for multiple 'climaxes'; that is, the masochist remains polymorphously perverse rather than penile centred. This is done in preference to Freud's understanding of heterosexual consummation where the male penis is seen as dominating the submissive

female vagina. An action Freud privileges above any other. The masochistic performer, by extending the possible surfaces of sensation and refusing the authority inherent in the maintenance of a penile sensibility, cuts across the sort of binary logic fundamental to male patriarchal power. Additionally, I would like to use some of the ideas of Bersani to support my argument that masochism may be used to subvert phallocentric power.

Subjectivity and "Psychic Shattering"

Bersani in *The Freudian Body* writes of Freud's two ontologies of sexuality; the first - forepleasure is associated with pre-pubescent sexuality, and is thought to be "due to excitation of erotogenic zones"[125]. The second is end pleasure or orgasm "due to the discharge of the sexual substances"[126]. However, Bersani refuses to accept Freud's rigidity in relation to matters of sexuality, suggesting instead that it is possible to find pleasure in the excitation and tension created by fore-pleasure. Bersani's position is one that wishes to acknowledge and explore the possibilities of sexual pleasure outside of the largely linear goal of Freud's phallocentricity, where sexual consummation through vaginal penetration is of paramount importance. Bersani drew attention to the importance of a broader understanding of the body's paths to 'pleasure'. In addition he introduced the concept of "psychic shattering"[127].

> Human sexuality is constituted as a kind of psychic shattering, a threat to the stability and integrity of the self.[128]

"Psychic shattering" is understood to occur when the combined forces of restraint and pain result in the subject being 'split', that is, there is an opening up or play between what we understand to be the usual sense of a secured

subjectivity and the loss or fragmentation of that subjectivity. In this way the very structures and permanence of selfhood are called into question through these oscillations. I believe this idea of "psychic shattering" is an interesting one because of the way in which it indicates the impermanence, fragility and mutability of the concept of self and the way in which it may point to a transcendence of the flesh and a release from the constraints of a fixed and permanent subjectivity. The characteristic explosiveness of "psychic shattering", as MacKendrick notes, may also work in opposition to the stillness and 'frozen' quality of Masoch's conceptualisations which are not, after all, intended to be acted out. For, it should be noted that there is a qualitative difference between the experience of "psychic shattering" that may be experienced through the reading of literature, when compared to that resulting from a direct physical experience of masochism. In addition this direct physical experience differs again from the spectator's experience of enacted or performed masochism. That is, it is possible for spectator and performer to experience a sense of "psychic shattering" on a number of different levels that will have various effects on physiological and psychological functioning. Furthermore, I would argue that "psychic shattering" may in addition be understood to have parallels with Mansfield's "total subject", as previously described, with its sense of fluctuating, indistinct boundaries[129].

Restraint and the Disciplined Subject

As I have already discussed, in Masoch's literary masochism Deleuze suggests suspension is described through the use of frozen imagery that recurs throughout *Venus in Furs*. Freezing never allows consummation and release, but rather forces a protracted tension of painful pleasure. However, as Karmen

MacKendrick has noted in *Counterpleasures,* arresting movement quickly becomes uninteresting, instead she suggests that it is the combination of "movement and stillness"[130], that is the ability to imagine images in fantasy and then physically create, repeat and re-freeze, that helps create and sustain some of the dynamics of masochism.

> The masochist renounces pleasure for waiting and watching, for the new pleasure of suspense and the fetishized image. Here too, pleasure becomes dependent upon repetition: in this case the repetition of the image, not only as reiteration but as permanence or endurance.[131]

According to MacKendrick pleasure may be achieved through the body's resistance to power, that is pleasure derived from a show of the body's strength when faced with oppositional forces. Restraint ensures there is no escape while pain draws one back to the corporeal as nothing else can, controlling and consuming in this temporary lapse that breaks through the limits of the self beyond articulation, or as MacKendrick puts it:

> There is a sense of being slammed, repeatedly, into the wall of oneself, against one's own ego boundaries until these break, and, with them, shatter the descriptive capabilities of language. Pain thus reinforces and amplifies the power of restraint.[132]

These forces are not limited to the physical, bodily bonds, but are related to power in its "more pernicious and insidious forms" that are challenged by masochism and sadomasochistic practices [133]. MacKendrick understands restraint as leading to an intensification of desire which remains unrequited, that is, sexual suspension is achieved.

> Restraint refuses easy release to the point of altering the very nature of desire. Desire becomes both power and pleasure.[134]

Strategies that displace and realign desire from the customary regions of the 'disciplined' social subject tap into the powers of resistance that MacKendrick sees as subversive. This resistance was originally deemed to be impossible according to Michel Foucault given that no individual stands outside the subject-constructing forces of disciplinary power[135]. Nevertheless, as MacKendrick notes, resistance arises paradoxically as a result of this power, revealing it as a power that structures the acculturated subject, playing as it does, in opposition to those cultural forces and notions of the 'good subject'. The 'good subject' being "Foucault's disciplined subject [who] is efficient, productive and working under the imperative of complete use".[136] This in some ways is the logical extension of Reik's "victory through defeat" and Deleuze's "rebirth"[137]. For, as MacKendrick goes on to point out, when the individual body is evaluated in terms of his/ her productivity and commodity value, which has become of increasing importance in Western consumer led society, masochistic activity with its failure to follow the biological and patriarchal imperatives that lead to consummation/ tangible results / orgasm plays against the socio-economic endgame that effectively approves and condones the teleology of sexual gratification via widely acculturated and accepted penile norms. Masochism in performance, in this context, may be seen as a strategy of subversion. This is a subversion that I believe has an indirect political efficacy. Masochism in performance provides a means of gaining an acknowledgement, through witnesses, that there are other ways of experiencing and framing 'desire' and that 'resistance' is both possible and necessary.

In this chapter I have contextualized masochism as it has come to be understood in Western psychoanalytic, literary and cultural theory and

additionally I have provided a number of rationales for the use of masochism as an artistic trope in performance. In the course of this thesis I will extend and elaborate this interpretation of masochism and its relationship to contemporary performance practices, illustrating my argument with examples that I believe manifest masochistic qualities. I do this in order to substantiate my primary thesis that masochism does indeed provide a means of resistance to the limits of contemporary 'desirable' subjectivity, concerned as it is with technological change, socio-political alienation and the embodied self in late-capitalist, post-industrial society.

Witness This

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter the majority of the performances addressed during the course of this thesis have been accessed through video recordings, with the exception of Franko B's *I Miss You* and *Lover Boy,* both of which were seen live, and the work of Karen Finley, to which I have only had access through descriptions and photographs. I would like to point to the challenges posed by experiencing performance work in this manner and relate it to my interpretation and use of the idea of 'witnessing' as well as the significance of writing on performance as an act of witnessing. Clearly to see a 'live' performance mediated through a screen is a qualitatively different experience from an audience member who was present in the same space as the performer, however, that is not to say that the potential efficacy of the work in this context is necessarily negated. As I will argue in my chapter on the work of Ron Athey, the masochistic performer finds satisfaction in having his 'painful' situation witnessed by others, who testify to and confirm his actions. For Athey, the live presence of 'witnesses' is a crucial part of the process of his

performance work, just as it is for the other performers I examine. There is a need for witnesses to acknowledge Athey's actions during the time of the performance. This is something I will expand upon in chapter four, as well as the additional role the 'live' witness potentially has in masochistic performance. But this need not be the only way in which these performances are powerfully affective, and I am suggesting that there is potential efficacy in viewing the documentation of a performance, even when this performance has clearly been mediated and is something separate from and essentially derivative of the original. Clearly my presence or absence is an important element to take into account in relation to 'witnessing', for both the performer and the 'witness', but this factor does not exclude me from offering an interpretation of these performances and commenting on what I believe to be the efficacy of these performances. In fact, the virtual, if admittedly partial, extension of the performance space, through a videoed 'remnant' of the performance experience, plays an important part in the broader access to and distribution of performers work to audience's who for many reasons may not have the opportunity of seeing these performances 'live'. Or, as Phillip Auslander argues, our experience of a recorded performance/ performer may encourage us to see that performer 'live', so that the 'live' performance may be seen as being promoted through our access to the recorded[138]. Furthermore, in a consideration of witnessing it is important to acknowledge my writing itself as a continuation of witnessing. That is, my reflections on this work are themselves acts of witness and a further dissemination of this material, and in your reading you provide the witness with a further witness.

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[1] Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege : Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*,1996, p323.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* (New York/London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1960, p43.
[3] Ibid., p19.
[4] Ibid., p30.
[5] Ibid., p32.
[6] Ibid., pp26-29.
[7] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, (New Jersey :Princeton University Press, 1995), pp36-37.
[8] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1980), p98.
[9] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan, (London, Penguin, 1991), '...the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations. However, there were several new things in these techniques. To begin with, there was the scale of the control: it was a question not of treating the body, *en masse*, 'wholesale', as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power of the active body. Then there was the object of the control: it was not or was no longer the signifying elements of behaviour or the language of the body, but the economy, the efficiency of the movements, their internal organisation;...' pp136-137.
[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,*(New York/London : Routledge, 1990), p140.
[11] Ibid., p141.
[12] See Susan Bordo, '"Material" Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture' in Donn Welton, ed., *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp45-59.
[13] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans., Leon S. Roudiez (NewYork : Columbia University Press, 1982), p3.
[14] Ibid., p71.
[15] Ibid., p72
[16] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. G. Bennington and B.Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p15.
[17] Rebecca Schneider,*The Explicit Body in Performance,* (New York/London: Routledge, 1997), p36.
[18] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics,* (London: Abacus, 1972).
[19] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p26 and p10.
[20] Ibid., p16.
[21] Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexuality' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Vol.7, 1953, p157.
[22] Ibid., p157.
[23] Ibid., p158.
[24] Ibid., p158.
[25] Ibid., p158.
[26] Ibid., p157.
[27] Ibid., p158.
[28] Ibid., p159.
[29] Ibid., Vol.18, p9.
[30] Ibid., pp9-11.

[31] Ibid., p15.
[32] Ibid., p29.
[33] Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, 1986, p60; Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, 1991, p40.
[34] Gilles Deleuze, 1991, pp39-40.
[35] Ibid., p41.
[36] Sigmund Freud, Vol.7, 1953, p159.
[37] Gilles Deleuze,1991, p46.
[38] Sigmund Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten', Vol.17, 1961, p185.
[39] Ibid., p185.
[40] Ibid., p189.
[41] Ibid., p186.
[42] Ibid., p186.
[43] Ibid., p177.
[44] Ibid., pp189-190.
[45] Ibid., p198.
[46] Ibid.,1961, Vol. 19, p159.
21 Ibid., Vol.18,1955, p10. For details of the Reality Principle, see 'Formulations on the Principles of Mental Functioning', Vol.12, p219.
[48] Ibid., Vol.19, 1961, p161.
[49] Ibid., Vol.7, 1953, p158.
[50] Ibid., Vol.17, 1961, p161.
[51] Ibid., p163.
[52] Ibid., pp163-164.
[53] Ibid., p165.
[54] Ibid., p 162.
[55] Ibid., p162.
[56] Ibid., p162.
[57] Ibid., p162.
[58] Ibid., p165.
[59] Ibid., p166.
[60] Ibid., p166.
[61] Ibid., p169.
[62] Ibid., p169.
[63] Ibid., p169.
[64] Ibid., p170.
[65] Ibid., p170.
[66] Theodor Reik, 'Masochism in Modern Man' in *Of Love and Lust: On the Psychoanalysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions*, 1974, p361.
[67] Ibid., p361.
[68] Ibid., p212.
[69] Adrian Heathfield, 'Out of Sight' in *Void Spaces* by Hugo Glendinning and Tim Etchells, 2000, p21. See also Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: New Performance and Forced Entertainment*, 1999, pp17-18 and Peggy Phelan, 'Performing Questions, Producing Witnesses' in the same publication, pp9-14.
[70] Ibid., p223.
[71] Ibid., p230.
[72] Ibid., p233.
[73] Ibid, p361.
[74] Ibid. p360.
[75] Theodor Reik, 1974, p363.
[76] Ibid., p365.

[77] Gilles Deleuze,1991.
[78] Ibid., p14.
[79] Ibid., p22.
[80] Ibid., p22.
[81] Ibid., p55.
[82] Ibid., p58.
[83] Ibid., p59.
[84] Ibid., p93.
[85] Ibid., p95.
[86] Ibid., p95.
[87] Ibid., p95.
[88] Ibid.,p100.
[89] Ibid., p128.
[90] Ibid., p33.
[91] Ibid., p53. "The woman in the dream, at the beginning of *Venus*, expresses in her speech a romantic nostalgia for the lost world of the Greeks."
[92] Ibid., p54.
[93] Ibid., p55.
[94] Ibid., p71.
[95] Ibid., p20.
[96] Ibid., p75.
[97] Ibid., p77.
[98] Ibid., p77.
[99] Ibid., p78.
[100] Ibid., p86.
[101] Ibid., p87.
[102] Ibid., p87.
[103] Ibid., p87.
[104] Ibid., p88.
[105] Ibid., p89.
[106] Ibid., p75.
[107] Ibid., p51-52.
[108] Ibid., p63-64.
[109] Ibid., p33.
[110] Ibid., p42.
[111] Theodor Reik,1974, pp197-366.
[112] Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power,* 1997, p71.
[113] Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 1998, p55.
[114] Ibid., p11.
[115] Ibid., p11.
[116]Ibid., p11.
[117] Ibid., p11.
[118] Karen Horney, 'The Problem of Feminine Masochism' in *Feminine Psychology*, 1967, p222.
[119] Theodor Reik,1974, p342.
[120] Ibid., p344.
[121] Ibid., p346.
[122] Ibid.,p347.
[123] Ibid., p355.
[124] Ibid., p348.
[125] Sigmund Freud quoted by Leo Bersani, 1986, p32.
[126] Ibid., p33.

[127] Ibid., p60.
[128] Leo Bersani, 1986, p60.
[129] Nick Mansfield, 1997, px.
[130] Karmen MacKendrick, 1999, p63.
[131] Ibid., p63.
[132] Ibid., p119.
[133] Ibid., p102.
[134] Ibid., p109.
[135] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1991,p221.
[136] Karmen MacKendrick, 1999, p110.
[137] Theodor Reik, 1974, p360, Gilles Deleuze, 1991, pp126-127.
[138] Philip Auslander, *Liveness : Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (London / New York : Routledge, 1999), pp30-33.

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ : ERASING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EGO

In this chapter I will provide a historical context for what I am arguing are contemporary masochistic performance practices by examining and situating some of the work of earlier masochistic performers. I provide this context because, just as the psychoanalytic and cultural theories of masochism are important for the framing of my overall argument and methodology, I believe by looking at the historical circumstances out of which masochistic performers emerged, I can begin to focus upon and explore some of the broader socio-political dimensions of masochistic performance.

This chapter takes a look at a number of what I consider to be key figures and events in this admittedly selective history. I give particular emphasis to the work of Marina Abramović. One of the reasons I have chosen Abramović's work is because her performance work spans a number of decades during which a number of unprecedented changes occurred in society and politics not least of which was the formation and development of the women's movement. The women's movement went some way towards altering power disparities in gender relations as well as questioning the investment of patriarchal power structures in maintaining a sado-masochistic economy. This economy, mentioned in my introduction, perpetuates socially sanctioned forms of 'everyday' masochism. In looking at the changing dynamics of Abramović's performance work over this extended period of time issues of gender, national identity and political issues of the times become particularly evident through an analysis of her work. In addition Abramović's work allows me to make a key definitional distinction between 'risk' based and 'masochistic' performances which I will examine a little later in the chapter.

Early works up to 1975

Abramović's artwork, moving from an easel-based painterly tradition to working with the body, provided an interpretative challenge to Yugoslavian society in the late 1960s / early 1970s. I will consider this challenge in relation to the art and performance work created during a similar period in Western Europe and the United States in order to determine similarities and disparities between artists working with a masochistic approach. This investigation is pertinent to my research because it enables me to go some way towards an analysis of the nature and function of masochistic performance produced under different socio-political circumstances.

Firstly, I will argue that Abramović's initial work consisted of predominantly personal explorations that involved risk but *not* masochism as I have defined it for the purposes of performance. That is, I will argue that masochistic art practices require a degree of control that is absent in a number of her earliest performance pieces. I am here specifically referring to her Rhythm series, particularly *Rhythm 0, Rhythm 2* and *Rhythm 4*. I will argue that artists in Western Europe and the United States were during this time experimenting with the conflation of art and reality in ways that were intended to shorten the distance between audience and art-maker, blurring art /life distinctions. Whereas the performance and artwork of Abramović at this time was much more concerned with a deliberate exploration of the limits of the physical body enacted through high-risk performance strategies. I would argue that the majority of these early performances were not masochistic in terms of my framing of masochism, because this framework requires a certain performer / audience distance.

Collaborative period 1975-1988

One of the key areas of masochistic performance that I want to address in relation to Abramović's is whether the 'submission' Abramović at times appears to subscribe to, is actually a 'victory' in 'defeat' (in Reik's terms). Do these actions suspend and /or ridicule patriarchal power? And how is this complicated by Ulay's presence between 1975 and 1988? Is the sado-masochistic economy of patriarchal power called into question in Ulay's and Abramović's combined works? During Abramović's time working with Ulay a masochistic methodology is used in attempts to free themselves of their individual subjectivity in favour of an apparently shared one. I will scrutinise these efforts in an endeavour to determine the possibilities and limitations of these combined performances and assess whether an enactment of sado-masochistic elements is necessarily a result of these works, concerned as they were with the relationship of two egos.

Post-Ulay Period,1988 -Today.

I will argue that this latest period of Abramović's development is a culmination of her gradual transition from a masochistic practice based on determining and extending physical limits, to a masochistic practice that works through physical and psychical limits. I will attempt to provide some possible explanations for this shift in focus as I chart the changes in Abramović's perceptions of what is achievable through the masochistic body.

According to Kathy O'Dell in *Contract with the Skin*, North American artists of the 1970s used masochism in performance partially in response to American internal and external affairs, namely the changes currently occurring in contract

law (internal) and the Vietnam war (external). O'Dell suggests that artists that used masochism were attempting to "create metaphors for a type of negotiation – contractual negotiation – that might bring balance to the war-induced instability they were experiencing."[1] However, as O'Dell is quick to point out, it would be a superficial interpretation that belies the complexity of a masochistic response manifest in / through performance to suggest that these current events directly resulted in masochistic performance practices. O'Dell acknowledges, as I do, that these works were not a direct response to socio-historical events. However, it is important, if we adopt a Foucauldian standpoint, to acknowledge that no artist operates in complete isolation from the particular temporal and spatial circumstances of their acculturated subjectivity. In order to go some way to overcoming the problem of trying to both contextualise the work, while at the same time avoiding a teleological approach to performance analysis, I would like to adopt Amelia Jones's notion of "instantiation", that is, the idea that the work of the artist acts as "both an articulation and a reflection" of a continually evolving subjectivity.[1] In this way, it is possible to understand the artwork as a process rather than an end point.

The period between the mid-1950s and the 1970s in the West is variously understood to be the acme of post-modernist revisionism. Jean François Lyotard interprets this as a time when established and monolithic socio-cultural and political 'narratives' were increasingly called into question:

> In contemporary society and culture - post-industrial society, post-modern culture - the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. The decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means [...] a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternatives and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services.[2]

The question of who might occupy the subject position in discourse was revised in an attempt to reveal both the subjective nature of all knowledge and the extent to which those who stood outside Western hegemonic power structures and systems of knowledge were disenfranchised, ignored or oppressed. This occurred at a time when many former colonies were vying for and gaining independence from their European colonisers, particularly in Africa. In addition the writings of previously unassailable canonical figures of Western culture were scrutinised, reassessed and reinterpreted. What were considered in earlier periods to be the largely unshakeable foundations of western 'metanarratives' and 'knowledge', had effectively been undermined or at least had their subjective position exposed as partial and fragmentary. The very basis of communicative structures that inform / form language and semiotics were deconstructed in a desire to reveal just how these mechanisms operate to perpetuate certain sorts of hierarchical configurations.[3] Furthermore, these movements of critical rupture led to an explosion of discourse in many areas of newly politicised concern, like feminism and the rights of minority groups. However, it should be noted that in order to carry out this process of 'unmaking', analytical practices may be adopted that are just as rooted to a system of theoretical discourse as the ones supposedly revealed / exposed. Therefore it is necessary to exercise caution when making suppositions about critical practices and the nature of power, 'knowledge' and oppression.

The choice of the body as a site of performance, in this 'post-modern' context, has been variously read as a desire to counter the notion of image production as the only reality, a return to the body not as a surface representation or image, but as sensate flesh. This was particularly significant for female performers because of their traditional positioning as objects to be viewed, particularly in the

context of art and art history.[4] And, as I will discuss in relation to the performance work of Ron Athey, this was also significant for gay performers who wished to emphasise that the gay body is a 'real' body, that is, that the gay body has the same basic physiology and flesh-bound fragilities as a 'straight' body. However, at the same time I acknowledge the emphasis in gay politics placed upon maintaining 'difference', as well as the difference in every person's experiential understanding of their own body.

The body within the traditions of performance art may be understood as an action against the creation of art objects that are readily commodifiable, that is, as an act of defiance against the capitalist orientated circulation of art objects, particularly amongst museums, collectors and dealers. It is therefore somewhat ironic that many of the incidental objects that were used or produced during many of these now historical performances were the subject of display at the recent *Out of Actions* exhibition in1998 that charted the course of performance art since its historically acknowledged inception. Furthermore, Michel Foucault, as I have mentioned, had argued for the body being the site for the operation of disciplinary powers and surmised that the body is a culturally inscribed surface.[5] In this way Foucault implied that there exists a neutral body prior to this inscription: a thesis over which there has been much contrasting debate concerning the nature and reality of the material body.[6] Many avant-garde artists apparently desired to go beyond the surface effects of their constructed selves and move beyond the constrained 'docile' body he theorised. Though, as I later note, Foucault also argued that it was impossible to stand outside the social system one was attempting to critique, suggesting that all 'resistance' is recoupable.

It is also significant that during the 1970s new imaging technologies in science and medicine were beginning to emerge, and that these technologies allowed for an increased internal and external surveillance of the body, adding to the growing sense that not only was 'big brother watching you' he was looking right through you. To deal with flesh in performance and art within this context may, on some level, be an exploration of what it means to be human beyond that which can be calculated and calibrated by machine culture. In addition the use of the body in pain or bleeding reinforced the notion that here was the 'real' body not a simulacrum or simulation.[7] Furthermore the 'real' presence of the body in art, together with an audience, were understood to be an important source of reciprocating energies between spectator and performer, an almost tangible sensation unique to live performance that encouraged performers like Abramović to exceed their own limits.[8]

In the West, the socially and religiously prescribed restrictions and limits concerning pre-marital sexual relations were being exceeded too with the free availability of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s. This freedom forged a new relationship, not just between the sexes, but in people's relationships with their own bodies. This allowed people to pleasurably explore the sexual and sensual body without some of the risks (i.e. unwanted pregnancy), traditionally associated with 'pre-marital' relations. This contributed to a cultural climate that was already questioning the nature of social constructions, accepted cultural norms for behaviour and patriarchal power structures. Some artist's work, like Carolee Schneemann's *Meatjoy* (1964) which was an uninhibited celebration of the sensual, sexual body, wished to use exuberant, unrestrained, somewhat Dionysian rites involving male and female bodies and the flesh of animals, to explore beyond the conventional "pleasures of the flesh" and to "break into the taboos against the vitality of the naked body in movement".[9] But many

masochistic artists refused the obvious 'pleasurable' body and instead looked to the body in 'pain' to seek out another dimension of experience, that was not necessarily the result of freedom but the result of constraint, restriction, and sometimes seemingly self-destructive impulses which I will explore in relation to Abramović's work later in this chapter. However, I do want to point to the contrast between the Western, particularly female artistic preoccupation with using the body itself as the site of contestation for corporeal and representational politics - a direct result of the increasing influence of the embryonic women's movement of the time, and Abramović's claim, noted by Chrissie Iles in an interview, that her use of the body at this time was not concerned with issues related to the 'taboo' or naked body on stage because the politics of communism were a pre-eminent concern.[10] Whether this was really so or not, what spectators did understand to be controversial was Abramović's use of the communist star. For Abramović, it would seem the use of this symbol was a much more radical political and personal artistic 'statement' than her undressed body because of the implied critique of notions of control, 'constraint / restriction' and the communist regime embodied in her actions.

Revolutionary Fervour

> This explosion was provoked by groups in revolt against modern technical and consumer society, whether it be the communism of the East or the capitalism of the West. They are groups, moreover, which have no idea what they would replace it with, but who delight in negation, destruction, violence, anarchy and who brandish the black flag (General de Gaulle, June 7th 1968)[11]

In addition to the social and sexual changes, the political climate was rapidly altering. The year 1968 is singled out in Europe and the United States as a year of unprecedented large-scale uprisings and public expressions of dissatisfaction. This was a response to what was understood to be the overarching powers of

capitalist economics, the war in Vietnam and a pervasive liberalism that was felt, by students particularly, to arrest the ability to take up radical ideas and alternatives in society. These sentiments echoed the thought and writing of Herbert Marcuse, who was then a professor of philosophy teaching at a University in California. His 'One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society' (1964) and his essay 'Repressive Tolerance' (1965) are understood by some historians of this period to have been widely influential to the students at this time.[12] Marcuse made it clear in 'Repressive Tolerance' that he was sceptical of the possibility of complete freedom from constraint advocated by the liberal bourgeois, and suggested the use of a "defensive" violence. Marcuse wrote:

> I believe that there is a 'natural right' of resistance for oppressed and overpowered minorities to use extra-legal means if the legal ones have proved to be inadequate [...] If they use violence they do not start a new chain of violence but try and break an established one.[13]

In April 1968, at Columbia University, New York, there was a student rebellion in which students protested for a more truly democratic society. In France, following the events in the U.S., there were student demonstrations throughout Paris. The events in Paris were not originally organised by the traditional opponents of capitalism, the Communist Party, but were the result of individual student groups whose ideologies and beliefs encompassed a broad range of positions, including Maoists, Castroists, Trotskyites, etc. However, once the strength and broad base appeal of the student movement became apparent, the Communist Party were quick to add their voices to the general clamour. It is, however, important to note that the desire for change had a libertarian focus rather than a specific affiliation to any one established doctrine or ideology.

In France, largely in response to the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam, students and activists of the Comites Vietnam National (CVN) destroyed the Parisian office of American Express in an effort to demonstrate their sympathy with the Vietnamese. In Nanterre on the 22 March, several hundred students, in a symbolic act of defiance, occupied the administrative building of the Université de L'Ouest Parisien, Nanterre. Historian Daniel Singer writes:

> They set up commissions - on student and workers' struggle, the class structure of the university, imperialism - produced a manifesto, and had time to depart before the police were called in.[14]

This was the genesis of the March 22 Movement who were instrumental in creating the momentum that came to precipitate the events of May 1968. Daniel Cohn Bendit was a member and he 'led' a group of around 40 students in a protest over the presence of plain-clothed police in the university. Their initially small-scale student protest acted as a catalyst that brought to an apogée the already widespread antagonism felt towards the current political regime and elitist university system. What was so shocking and unexpected to the authorities was the depth of these shared feelings.[15] For soon the working classes had joined forces with the students until many of the universities and factories were occupied by students and workers in a demonstration of widespread solidarity. Large scale riots and strikes followed in which 10 million workers were called out. The brutality of the police in confrontation with students was widely televised and covered by the press in France and abroad. This only strengthened the resolve of the French people to support those protesting. De Gaulle was finally forced to consider the students' propositions and the workers demands in what had become a revolutionary situation. A general election was soon announced. Furthermore, the events in France were not isolated, as Rose Lee Goldberg indicates:

> In the United States and in England, France and Germany, organized student protest on the one hand and events organized by artists on the other would reach a crescendo in 1968 and 1969. The confrontations at Kent State University, Chicago's Democratic Convention, Berkeley's People's Park in San Francisco, Woodstock The University of Paris at Nanterre, the London School of Economics- All marked crises in the storm of political and social unrest.[16]

However, in spite of this unexpected show of revolutionary zeal both in France and beyond, very little real change came about as a result of these actions. As Terence Turner points out, this break with authority may have thrown theorists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, and the early writings of Foucault, into disarray by undermining their suppositions that such acts against institutionalised power were impossible:

> I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. In so far as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved.[17]

but the ultimate failure of the May events to initiate more than superficial changes ended by adding weight to such conjectures. Like a great many artists in the West, Chris Burden (U.S.), Gina Pane (Italy / France) and Orlan (France), found themselves caught up in the impact and subsequent shock waves of what had seemed, particularly for young people, to be something verging on the edge of a socio-cultural revolution that crossed national borders and continents. Abramović, too, was involved in student demonstrations and what she called "political disappointments", something she notes in her *Biography* performance (a work in continual progress).[18] However, as Bojana Pejić notes, within the context of art, this sense of, and desire for socio-cultural change and re-making was, as with some artists in the West, a rejection of Modernism's conception of art and of the perception of the artist as merely a maker of art objects.[19] Pelić

argues that the artist of the 1968 generation in Yugoslavia understood her / himself:

> Either as a 'martyr' who suffers because of the political system;
> or as an a-social genius acquainted with the mysteries of 'creation',
> or again as a bohemian 'in revolt' (and usually drunk).[20]

Abramović, as a part of this generation, seems to reflect something of this revolutionary attitude. She has said "all my work in Yugoslavia was very much about rebellion", and Abramović includes a revolt against the family structure as well as the systems of art in this.[21] I will subsequently examine Abramović's early artistic development and her personal preoccupations, placing her in relation to what may be considered her counterparts in the West. I do this in order to determine if her work could be said to have 'instantiated' parallel or disparate concerns, particularly in relation to the use of masochism in performance.

Marina Abramović was brought up in a household that she describes as having the routine akin to that of a "military academy", where she rose early "exercising to please her father, learning French to please her mother".[22] Both her parents, her father a Montenegrin and her mother a Serb, were Communist partisans (National Liberation Army headed by Josib Broz Tito) who were part of a guerilla movement that fought against Croatian fascists. Although the partisans were victorious, (with the aid of the Red Army), and Abramović's father General Vojo was considered a hero of the resistance, both Abramović's parents were greatly effected by the dreadful suffering they personally witnessed during this time. Abramović, much later in her performance history, drew upon her parent's testimony for the making of *Balkan Baroque* (1997). Abramović's mother, originally a medical student, found that her terrible experiences put her off continuing her studies. Instead she opted to pursue the visual arts, studying art

history and becoming the Director of the Museum of Art and Revolution of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. Abramović's upbringing played against a backdrop that was coloured by the memories her parents had of the war's inhumanity. She claims that she always knew that she would be an artist. "It was a necessity [...] the only way I could function in this world".[23]

However, in addition to the uncomfortable residue of her parents memories of struggle, Abramović grew up in an era of extraordinary change. Yugoslavia, which at this time was unified and a republic under the rule of the autocrat Tito, enjoyed an unusual position for a communist nation, in as much as it's citizens were allowed relative freedom of movement and could work in the West. This uncharacteristic flexibility and openness was due to the special relationship Yugoslavia had with the United States and the (former) Soviet Union which was largely a result of Yugoslavia's strategic position between 'East' and 'West'. Abramović, therefore, could move between Yugoslavia, Western Europe and the United States with comparative ease, which was important from the point of view of allowing her to live and perform internationally and because of the potential for an overlap of artistic influences.

From Paints to Pain

One early, reputedly formative, experience occurred when Abramović's father engaged an artist to give painting lessons to Abramović when she was 12 or 13 years old.[24] The artist placed a canvas on the floor, covered it in glue, pigment and sand. Gasoline was added so that he could then set the whole thing on fire. Abramović reports him saying "This is sunset" and then leaving.[25] This experience became important to Abramović because for her it demonstrated that the process of art-making was more important than the product. An idea that can

be tied back to a masochistic framework if we interpret the privileging of the creative *process* as a 'pleasurable' suspension designed to elongate or at least to delay the endpoint / consummation, otherwise known as the creative *product*. At sixteen, inspired by a plane she watched in the sky, she embarrassed her father by asking to borrow 15 aircraft from a military base where he worked, in order to create sky paintings with the dissipating clouds emitted from their exhaust.[26] Again this conception for a cloud piece appears to be related to the idea of transitory, process-emphasised art production. By contrast, the last work she created before turning to performance was a sound installation. Abramović placed on a bridge a three-minute looped recording of a building collapsing. The recording caused so much disruption and distress that it was removed shortly after installation. This piece reveals a fascination with the forces of destruction, and the desire to elicit a reaction from a public forced to confront her work in the course of their daily routine (i.e in crossing the bridge). So it could be argued that even as a very young artist, Abramović's desires in art- making were radical, uncompromising and process-based. She soon came to feel that "art was a kind of question between life and death".[27] She even proposed to a number of institutions, performance pieces that had death as a possible outcome.[28] The desire to shock her viewers was definitely part of her agenda, rebelling against socio-familial constraints and dictates. This understanding of the artist as someone who should be virtually boundless and provocative may be seen as an influential factor in her development of performances that involved physical risk.

Deborah Lupton draws upon the ground-breaking work of Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* when she writes in her book *Risk* that when activities or persons are classified as *a* or *at* risk, it is usually in order to preserve social and moral boundaries differentiating "polluting people" that need to be retained at the

periphery, from the 'area' of implied safety located at the 'centre' of society.[29] In this early period of performance, up to 1975, Abramović seemed chiefly concerned with expressing herself through her art in ways that used 'risk' rather than masochism.[30] It may be argued that Abramović wished at this time to strip away the protective surfaces that we use to create comfort and to shield ourselves from physical pain, discomfort or acute awareness of our mortality. I am suggesting that what Abramović did in these early performances was publicly challenge our understanding of what constituted an acceptable risk, in this way she intended to confront us with our physical complacency, our disembodied nature and demonstrate the ways in which pain has become a taboo region of experience in modern society. By placing herself *at risk* she becomes a potential source of 'pollution' situating her work at the margins of what is culturally acceptable. The risk she employed is derived from the lack of control manifest in a number of her actions during this early period. In the sexual practise of masochism, as I have discussed in my introduction, the masochist clearly delineates the boundaries of the actions to be performed upon his or her body, and although it is anticipated that these limits will be exceeded up to a point, there is a contractual (assumed or actual) agreement between the parties involved, that is designed to ensure that the masochist maintains overall control over proceedings. With reference to performance, this contract is notionally in operation between audience and performer, and is based upon the assumption that the performer has an idea of how the performance will progress (i.e. she controls proceedings) and that during that time the performer will retain consciousness.

I would argue that in Abramović's early solo work her engagement with the audience does not allow for the usual distance placed between performer and those performed to. Instead she demands a more intense and emotional

response from observers who are often actively involved in the piece's presentation. Although Abramović may have planned the parameters of her performance in her own mind, the audience is not privy to this knowledge. This is why there would normally be a tacit agreement between the two that relegates responsibility for performed actions to the performer, thus allowing for this information gap. However, I would argue that *Rhythm 5, Rhythm 0* and *Thomas Lips* in fact radically contravene the conventional performance contract and cannot be construed as genuinely masochistic. Abramović places herself in a position of risk that is contrary to that of the masochist as previously delineated. That is, I would argue that Abramović's performance work at this time (with the exception of *Rhythm 10*) did *not* use masochism as I am defining it and therefore stand outside the framework I have constructed for the purposes of this study. However it would be useful to examine these pieces in order to clarify exactly how I am utilising the idea of masochism as an empowering artistic trope.

As a consequence of her performance choices, Abramović has left herself open to invasion and even abuse, in particular I am referring to *Rhythm O* (1974) a work that echoes Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964/5/6) in which Ono kneels in front of the audience and allows a member of the audience to cut at her clothing while she remains inert. In Abramović's piece 72 items have been laid out. These items are made up of such things as a feather, needles, nails, a hammer, a perfume bottle, grapes, olive oil, a rose, a gun and a bullet. Abramović adopts a motionless position next to these objects, while the director of the gallery announces that the artist will remain passive for the next six hours and will comply with whatever the audience chooses to do to her. At first the audience / participants were content to undertake relatively small interventions, such as placing a thorny rose in her hands and then across her body, photographing her

and placing the results in her hands to display, writing on her, kissing her and moving her body around. It is clear from the photographic record of this piece that these activities have already caused a certain amount of distress to Abramović and an audience member at one point takes a handkerchief and wipes the tears from her face. In addition there are a number of descriptions of this performance piece.[31] These accounts vary in their specifics but it would seem that gradually as time passed, and the boundaries of her subjectivity remained unguarded, more challenging and harmful possibilities occurred to members of the audience who, uncensored, decided to cut her, remove clothing from her until finally a loaded pistol was placed in her hands and pointed at her head. Even at this point Abramović did not terminate the performance. It was only the intervention of concerned audience members who grouped together that prevented the piece continuing. In her attempt to address the question of how the audience might respond to the freedom given to them, and where they might draw the limits, Abramović appears to have failed to set her own limits. Or if the items displayed are deemed to set these limits, items like the loaded gun may suggest an abandonment of responsibility or an incitement to power play – this may perhaps be construed as risk played to the ultimate limit. She allowed the audience to use her, the artist as object. And although Abramović would appear to be acting in a masochistic manner, she, in fact, actually allowed herself to become an experimental victim in a way that is contrary to masochism as I am defining it. The masochist, as I have interpreted him /her, would not ever have abandoned so completely all means of control in this manner. Is her passivity a brave display of her drive to walk the outer limits of experience, a quiet exposition of her fundamental trust in human nature or a reckless abandonment of her subjectivity? I would have to argue for the latter of these explanations given that in 1970 she submitted a proposal to the Galereija Doma Omladine, Belgrade for a performance (Untitled) in which she wished to dress in

the clothes her mother would have chosen for her to wear and then place a gun loaded with one bullet to her temple. According to Thomas McEvilley in 'Stages of Energy : Performance Art Ground Zero?' in *Artist / Body*, Abramović understood this piece as having two possible endings, one of which ends with the trigger being pulled and Abramović presumably dying or at the least sustaining head-wounds. The alternative ending has the trigger being pulled without fatal or mortal consequences, in which case she would redress in her own way and go home. It is as if, as McEvilley has put it, "she would rather kill herself than be bound by the rules of Western civilization."[32]

These performances are not isolated examples, that is, these are not the only early works that are intent upon reaching out to a zone of extreme risk that includes the possibility of death. During *Rhythm 5*, a work also carried out in 1974, Abramović marked out a large star filled with woodchips and 150 litres of petrol. After ritually cleansing herself through a cutting of her hair and nails, she set these things and the star alight, placing herself in a horizontal position at the centre of it, unaware that the level of oxygen within the star was being reduced as the fire burnt. The smoke that surrounded her prone body soon caused her to lose consciousness. It was only when an audience member detected that Abramović did not respond to the flames encroaching upon the flesh of her legs that they were prompted to take action to prevent her asphyxiation. Again, Abramović appears to have relinquished responsibility and consequently faced unanticipated personal risk. In this example the control, or responsibility for what happened during her performance seems to have been transferred to her audience. At least her audience perceived the risk to be beyond toleration and required intervention. For some members of the audience this may not be a welcome burden, it may suggest to them that the viewer, notionally concerned for the welfare of Abramović, may have to adopt a rather vigilant attitude when

attending one of her pieces. It may be that the audience's calculation of risk may make them uncertain and perhaps anxious that she may come to harm. As I have suggested, this essentially reconfigures the traditional audience / performer relationship where there is usually an unspoken arrangement / contract that places the audience in a position of relative physical passivity. The audience, may instead see themselves becoming like minders, uneasy observers of the activities of a woman who, through their own determination of risk, might be interpreted as 'out of control'. Spectators recast themselves as active agents ready to intervene as and when necessary 'for her own good'. Abramović may have been drawing attention to how we understand and interpret risk and bodily sensations, but she also opens up the possibility that her actions may be understood as on the verge of pathology. It could be argued that the audience's responsibility for the performer had reached the point where it outweighed that of the performer they had come to watch. I would argue that, although Abramović's risk performances raise some interesting questions in respect of our understanding of what is permissible and impermissible risk, her repudiation of personal authority over what is done to, or happens to her body becomes a problematic performance choice, particularly for a female performer. These works highlight just how easy it was for her body to become objectified and her own autonomy as the person who placed herself in this position to be dismissed. As I have suggested in my introductory chapter, when women use pain in performance there is always the possibility that their actions may compound the viewers sense of their 'natural' propensity towards submission and pain understood as a sort of co-requisite of their biological function. This essentialist viewpoint works against the idea of masochistic practice as an alternative means of freeing the individual from fixed notions of subjectivity. The 'excess' manifest in performance may easily be misconstrued as mental disorder or even psychosis when it seems that the degree of her abandon has few limits

and no concern for her own safety is outwardly expressed or made manifest. It may be argued that by providing her audience with the 'real' body undergoing ritualistic acts of self-inflicted harm, she may have been attempting to show the depth of her devotion to achieving an alternative art to the point where she not only risks her physical integrity, moving through different states of consciousness, but also her life. If her actions had resulted in her death would it have been possible for spectators to accept this 'sacrifice' in the name of art? In her dissolution of the barriers between art and life, has the protection and distance these barriers offer been exchanged for an almost inevitable human response on the part of the audience that inscribes a patronising and infantilising attitude, that terminates her performances for 'her own good'? It could be argued that perhaps Abramović is hoping to shock the audience, through her own loss of control, out of their collective inertia into taking responsibility for actions that they observe, particularly violent ones. This 'shock' effect may be considered as an act against what Lupton calls the neo-liberal attitude typical of a Foucauldian perspective on risk that encourages "far less reliance upon social insurance and far more upon individual self-management and self-protection from risk".[33] Furthermore, her actions may be seen to question the role and positioning of the audience in live art and in life. The confusion created by the conflation of the two and the refusal to allow a distance-producing gap to open up between reality and representation clearly undermined the usual distinctions that operate to create audience / performer 'safety' or comfort zones and a 'frame' through which the audience may distinguish art from life. By refusing to make such a distinction a levelling effect is achieved.

According to McEvilley in his article 'Art in the Dark', attempts to universalise art, that is, to see art in everything and every action, had been a significant preoccupation for many artists since Marcel Duchamp. This was an attempt to

shift our understanding of what art could be or mean by almost arbitrarily designating objects (e.g. Duchamp's urinal *Fountain*), places (e.g.Dennis Oppenheim's sitemarkers) or people (e.g.Piero Manzoni's *Living Sculpture*,1961) as art. Artists such as Yves Klein decided against painting *from* live models and instead painted *with* live models in his trademark International Klein Blue producing *The Anthropometries of the Blue Period*,1960.[34] Allan Kaprow was responsible for initiating many Happenings in order that "the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct, as possible."[35] However, as McEvilley points out, this process of "universal appropriation" of any aspect of the world as art has certain limits.[36] The action may be real but has semantically become a "shadow-real" as it is categorised as art. So while it may be seen to reflect all the world, it still remains a shadow in that world, that will continually regress as one appropriation is appropriated and re-appropriated infinitely,[37] which led Yves Klein to the core of the problem announcing "The painter only has to create one masterpiece, himself, constantly" bringing the notion that the artist IS the art to the centre of artistic discourse at this time and posing the perhaps unanswerable question how can the artist be distinguished from their art?[38] It is perhaps precisely these perplexities that Abramović was endeavouring to expose and explore. But in some of these early works it is equally possible that the audience, rather than reflectively accommodating Abramović's decisions, instead experienced horror and fascination in equal measures for what may to them have appeared to be a bizarre, damaging and 'unnecessarily' risky methodology, adopted by an apparently 'wayward' female who was not prepared to stop at anything. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that audience members attending the performances of Chris Burden did *not* find it necessary to go to his assistance. For instance in *Shoot* (1971) a friend of Burden aimed and fired a gun at him. Burden, although deliberately blurring the line between reality and his art,

carried out this piece within the defining confines of an art gallery thus signifying how this action was to be viewed. By contrast, his *Deadman* piece in which he lay at the road side covered with a tarpaulin, gave so little indication of its status as art performance, that it was interpreted by the police, who were summoned by a worried member of the public, as a thoughtless prank. This activity consequently landed Burden in court. Thus the framing of the event was important to the spectator's ability to make an interpretative differentiation between artwork and prank regardless of whether the artist framed his actions as art.

Shoot was a performance that drastically altered Burden's physical integrity leaving "a hole through you that's smoking".[39] It was a performance that did go wrong. The bullet was meant to graze Burden's arm, not penetrate it, but still there was no audience intervention. Perhaps this was due to the speed of the performance, or because the audience was intimidated by the presence of a marksman. Or indeed it may simply have been that the artist was a man and it was assumed he would remain 'in control' and didn't require 'saving' because of his gender. What I would also like to suggest is that audience intervention becomes problematic for the masochist because the masochist is then faced with a situation that has effectively moved some distance out of the masochist's control. For the experience of masochism in performance, as I am framing it, to be personally empowering for the performer, the boundaries of control must be pushed to the limit, but not exceeded. A complete loss of control in effect signals 'failure', because through this loss of control the action becomes something else. It may still be art, but it is no longer masochistic art.

Whatever Abramović's reasons for carrying out her 'risky' works and the audience's uncomfortable relationship with them, they were certainly not the

only Abramović produced at this time. In the previous year (1973), she had performed *Rhythm 10*. This piece was conceived to use 20 knives (although on some occasions ten were used) and a tape recorder. Using her outspread hand Abramović rapidly stabbed between each of her fingers in turn with the first of the knives. When she cut herself, she changed knives and continued, stopping only when all the knives had been used. An audio tape recorded the entire performance. Once this had been done, Abramović listened to the audio recording of the performance so far, and then carried out the same actions again, cutting herself in the same places at the same time as in the first half of the performance. In other words, although Abramović was undertaking a series of painful actions, her concentration and control were such that she could reproduce, up to a point, her original actions. I would argue that this performance could be considered masochistic in a way *Rhythm 5* and *Rhythm 0* could not. In *Rhythm 10*, the process, although painful, is one of empowerment rather than destruction. Suspense operates as neither we nor Abramović know where the knife will fall and cut or when it will fall and miss. Abramović then, midway through performance, takes control over these apparently random events, and re-inscribes the cutting by a close reproduction of her original action that effectively negates the operation of this suspense (at least for her). This is a performance game she has set up for public exhibition and her ability to carry out these actions and re-do them with such a high degree of precision is evidence of her capacity to endure and control events in a way that is personally empowering. However, this remains a particularly disturbing performance for viewers, who, having witnessed Abramović take each knife in turn until an error of judgement resulted in a laceration, assumed that after the knives had been used the performance was complete, experiencing perhaps a cathartic release. Their relief, however was to be short-lived as they watched the artist carry on the performance by a re-cutting and reopening of the incisions already made in

a double assault, a simulated repetition. As Abramović later observed of her audience (Abramović uses the male pronoun but her comments apply equally to a male or female spectator):

> He wasn't sure anymore, he was unbalanced and this made a void in him. And he had to stay in this void. I didn't give him anything.[40]

These comments are interesting because they suggest that in the experience of her performance the audience become the submissive ones. Abramović's performance enacts a reversal that plays with audience /performer dynamics. It is also interesting that Abramović chose to use the male pronoun when referring to her audience - "I didn't give him anything". Abramović claims power for herself throughout these actions of apparent self-mutilation suggesting that in her ability to control her own actions and pain she has strength beyond the spectator, who remains inert, watching.

Rhythm 4 provides further evidence of her penchant for high risk performance actions, for which she claimed responsibility, but which involved risk activities that had physically and mentally unpredictable results which she was unable to control. In *Rhythm 4* she takes pills given for catatonia and experiences an epileptic seizure. For the second part of the performance she takes a strong tranquilliser and spends the performance quietly smiling in a rather inane way. Abramović argues that this performance demonstrates loss of control and control, "there was this opposition, first not controlling my body, then controlling it"[41], but I would argue that both sections of performance, once she had taken the pills, were fundamentally beyond her control, that is, the substance of the pill itself effectively overrode Abramović. By which I mean Abramović would be able to do little to stop the effects of these drugs once they reached her blood stream.

However, Abramović was not the only artist of this time who situated herself in such extreme circumstances.

> And the wound is the memory of the body; it memorizes its fragility, its pain, thus its 'real' existence. It is a defence against the object and against the mental prosthesis.[42]

It is difficult to determine in exactly what fashion or to what degree Pane influenced Abramović except to say that Abramović cites Pane's work as being important to her. Pane was concerned with the politics of representation, but did not subscribe to the sort of essential feminist approach adopted in the early seventies by artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (Womanhouse project).[43] Abramović, coming from a background which, she maintains, did not have the same sort of gender power issues in question, is more likely to have related to or responded to Pane's physical disruption of the body as a means of politicised expression. Pane, an Italian performer working mainly in France, produced a range of masochistic performances during the 1960s and 1970s that I would argue are concerned with drawing attention to the construction of subjectivity and the role of the spectator. Abramović's work, at this time, made manifest similar concerns. Abramović first met Gina Pane in 1975, although she may have been aware of Pane's work before this time. Pane, like Abramović had shifted from being a painter to working with the body. In the 1960s, Pane became disenchanted with the abstract geometric style that she used and was prevalent at the time, just as Abramović had felt the expressive limitations of modernism in Yugoslavia. Pane inclined towards sculpture before wishing to include motion in her work. Her "actions" - a term she preferred to 'performances', developed as a result of this.[44] By using the word 'action' she may have been making a tacit reference to the 'action' or 'gestural' painting of the abstract expressionist works of Jackson Pollock, his process of art production having been highlighted in Hans Namuth's 1950 film. The surface of

paintings like *Autumn Rhythm,* (1950), with its layering of long drips of paint, retains the evidence of how the work was produced. In this way, the tangible remnant of the process of making draws attention to 'process' itself. Pane's nomenclature for her works as 'actions' may also intend to emphasise 'process', which would parallel Abramović's similar preoccupation with the process over the product of art performance.

Integrity through fragmentation

O'Dell, taking a psychoanalytic approach, argues that Pane's use of masochism is intended to return her to the Lacanian mirror stage, a pre-linguistic period between the oral and oedipal, "functioning as a termination of the imaginary and an introduction to the symbolic"[45] which I discussed in my introduction. O'Dell argues that masochistic artists return to this stage to:

> Expose the masochistic pain inherent in the transition to the symbolic (a pain that is paradoxically simultaneous with flexible notions of identity) [...] their performances introduce a possible alternative to this pain: a compromise known in contract making as 'acceptance' or what I am calling 'negotiation' the act of dealing with both similarities and differences.[46]

That is, O'Dell sees the masochistic practices of artists like Pane as attempts to highlight the fragmented nature of subjectivity and the fragility of power structures in a society that is buoyed up by an illusion of wholeness and integrity. "The body forces the inescapable realization of an essential intersubjectivity.[47]

In earlier interpretations of Pane's work, like that of François Pluchart in the 1970s, Pane's work was seen as being concerned with underscoring the everyday occurrence of violence[48]. This 'everyday' violence, in effect, highlights

the sado-masochistic economy at the centre of patriarchy referred to in my introduction.

Pluchart sees Pane's use of the body as analogous to a physical projection of the conscience, so that "the body, having become a thinking and suffering matter, transforms itself into a coadjutant of thought."[49] In this way, the body, signifies and represents psychic pain that the audience reads through their ability to empathise with that which is experienced by a fellow body – in this case the experience of pain. *Escalade Sanglante* (1971), which I refer to later in this chapter, makes physically manifest the mental anguish and struggle Pane understands to be the experience of the Vietnamese, who at this time were still at war with the United States.

Pane, through her slicing, cutting and smashing was trying to use her body to directly communicate her socio-political agenda to the audience. Her acts of self-violation were not intended to reduce the body to the status of impotent silent (female) object, but were intended to scream out a message via the body in pain, regarding public complacency, inertia and injustice that was intended to arouse audience empathy and action. Abramović too, by situating her own body in implicitly dangerous situations, effectively motivated members of the audience to intervene, although it seems, as I later argue, that Abramović did not always intend this and that her audience were stirred to help her, personally, rather than to take the political action that Pane's work hoped for[50].

Pane's works however, were not always so clearly a response to external events. For instance works like *Discours mou et mat* were, as O'Dell records, to "get her father-mother relationship under control."[51] And, as such, would seem to have been psychological exercises of a highly personal nature that may or

may not have wider resonance for an audience, particularly an audience unfamiliar with the discourse of psychoanalysis. Pane's 'actions' with her body were clearly important for Abramović, but I would like to suggest that Abramović's work maintained a divergent emphasis, that seemed to be not so much concerned with working through psychological trauma or expressing political concerns, as it was with seeking out and extending her personal limits. For instance, Gina Pane stopped performing certain actions because she risked serious damage to herself in one 'action'. Abramović, on the other hand, did not seem deterred by any sort of personal risk at this stage of her development.

Her collaborative association with Ulay began in 1975 after they met at an international gathering of artists in Amsterdam. She sees this meeting as an important factor in re-focusing her energies.

> My earlier works were based on pain, they were very drastic. If I hadn't met Ulay, they would have destroyed my body. I was very fatalistic and more and more destructive [...] And then after we started working together our art became constructive.[52]

During a twelve-year period of working collaboratively from 1975 to 1988, Ulay (Uwe E. Laysiepen) and Abramović used a number of techniques to explore the creative possibility of two bodies making performance art. Although each piece dealt with a different aspect of subjectivity all three appeared to be concerned with attempting to empty out the body and mind through exhaustive processes that had no pre-determined limit. This desire to create through over-extension, pushing to the limits of the physical and mental, continued in their joint ventures. Their initial experimentations together have become known as the Relation series. All these works were concerned with creating performances that had no rehearsal, no pre-determined end, and included no repetitions, but did explore the myriad ways in which two people might come together. I would argue that these pieces, primarily dealing with endurance related activity intended to

explore and if possible extend the possibilities for experiencing a kind of shared subjectivity. That is, Abramović and Ulay were trying to achieve a level of synthesis. The possibility of temporary synthesis might come about as a result of a sort of pain-induced ego-dissolution or what Leo Bersani calls psychic shattering, whereby their individual status might be subsumed and that this might enable the couple to feel a sense of communion or unity. This sort of loss of subjectivity or embrace of Thanatos is sometimes connected with sexual orgasm (pétit mort) or *jouissance*. In the case of Ulay and Abramović their attempts at synthesis unsurprisingly seemed, to oscillate between conditions of masochism and sado-masochism. This is pertinent to my argument because it draws attention to the complexity of sado-masochistic relationships as well as providing a counterpoint to the wider and more generally repressive power of what I'm calling 'everyday' sado-masochistic power structures, discussed in my introduction, that are at the core of patriarchal power asymmetry.

Abramović and Ulay seemed happy to work within the traditional constructs of patriarchally defined notions of man and woman, that is, the focus of their work was not to question these constructions. Indeed, in at least one of their works they effectively played out the roles of male dominance and female submission in a way that I would argue was not intended to critique this 'natural' opposition, but as confirmation of what they considered to be the necessary interdependence of the sexes. In this instance the sado-masochistic economy of patriarchy is underscored but not in a way that questions it's dynamics or its validity. This may be seen to contrast with the concerns of many feminist artists of the 1970s who used their art to question the legitimacy of gender-based power structures and in addition disputed a number of issues in relation to art historical discourse; woman as the object of the male gaze, the trivialisation and/or exclusion of women artists' work.

I would argue that what I am considering a sado-masochistic dynamic is largely created by the presence of two separate subjectivities whose identities are never fully subsumed by what is attempted in performance, and because of the gender difference between the performers it is easy to interpret a number of their performances, (with the exception of the ambiguous, multifarious *Breathing In / Breathing Out*), as actually re-inscribing the sort of sado-masochistic relationship understood since Freud to be the 'natural' result of male and female biology as I discussed in my introduction.

Rest/Energy consists of the pair facing each other with a bow and arrow between them. The bow is held by Abramović, while the blindfolded Ulay holds the string and arrow. Each performer leans backward to achieve a balance that pulls the string taut and points the arrow towards Abramović's heart. The performance is over when either one of them loses concentration or becomes too fatigued to continue. It could be argued that Abramović, although facing Ulay's arrow, maintains a certain power through her strong, almost defiant gaze, apparently refusing submission, but it is Ulay who always retains the arrow and string, the one to penetrate rather than be penetrated. It is perhaps an exercise in their perfect trust of each other, Ulay not wanting to become a wounder /murderer and Abramović not wishing to be a victim, but their potential roles have already been cast, are already established, there is no flexibility, no freedom to play with what has been designated. In this way I would suggest that this piece, although demonstrating the strength of their mutual bond and commitment to risk in performance, was not primarily concerned with questioning male/female power structures. Rather, it may be argued that *Rest/Energy* presents a sado-masochistic tableau that typifies patriarchally-defined sexual relations.

Relation in Space used the naked body in frontal assaults, that is, the performers approached each other (or in at least one performance the wall of the gallery[53]), at varying speeds and allowed a collision to take place. This was repeated for an unspecified period of time until the performers chose not to continue. *Relation in Time* involved sitting motionless back to back with their hair plaited together so that their heads were joined about 25cm apart. In this piece there is a literal unity that they attempt to maintain in spite of the inevitable unravelling of their hair that gradually occurs over a period of 17 hours, (the first 16 of which occurs without an audience). I would argue that this performance adopts a masochistic practice. The prolonged stillness and upright positioning required to carry out the performance is clearly difficult to achieve and occurs as a result of their joint attempt to subjugate themselves, subsuming their separate selves to maintain a singularity symbolised by their connected hair. This would have been difficult without a shared fantasy of their connectedness to sustain them. The couple have effectively become an object unable to function away from the form they have created without destroying that object. Both performers must have been acutely aware that this transitory state could have been disrupted at any point should either have begun to act according to their individual will.

However, *Breathing In / Breathing Out* performed in the Studenski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade in April 1977, the two performers, with noses blocked with cigarette filters, share a breath for as long as possible, that is, they breathe only the exhaled air of the other, sustaining this mouth to mouth contact for as long as they are able. They continue with this one breath of air for 19 minutes at which point it seems as if either performer may cease functioning if fresh air is not taken in. Their fantasy would appear to be to breathe as one being, sharing

one of the most basic of life forces. In order to do this they undertake an exhausting and hopeless endeavour. This action only allows for a few minutes of consummation before they must desist. During this time they operate as one. The air tugging in and out of each performer's body and mouths requires their complete concentration. This may be interpreted as a critique of patriarchally defined binaries because their forced interdependence is not sustainable but mutually suffocating. It should also be noted that in this piece there is far less evidence of the sorts of sado-masochistic dynamics previously underscored because neither performer seems to dominate over the other. This may in fact be interpreted as a dissolution of binary based power. In terms of achieving a negation of individual subjectivity, their action in subsuming their differentiated egos through mutual masochism does allow them a sort of 'loss of self' as they become a single object / subject. However, this is achieved only for the duration of a single breath. Thus demonstrating that equitable masochism of this kind is largely unsustainable.

This masochism of interdependence is one that they explore extensively in their work together, 'suffering' in order to maintain what they have set in motion, knowing that both depend on each other for the duration of the piece. However, these combined performances would seem to confirm Jean-Paul Sartre's notion that there is nothing that can bridge the gap between the Self and the Other for more than seconds, not even masochistic manipulations. Such realisations of their limits, however did not prevent later experimental work that relied much more on a psychical interdependence. This apparently superseded their earlier primary concerns with the body. That is not to say that the body doesn't remain crucial and central to their performance work but there appears to be a much greater reliance on the mind controlling the body, whereas at an earlier time physical exertion and strength appeared to be key.

Talking About Similarity is a piece which, in a personal correspondence with O'Dell, Ulay reveals to be inspired the actions of members of the Baader-Meinhof gang who were imprisoned in 1972 for their extreme political actions. This group symbolised their resistance to imprisonment by sewing their own lips together and it is this image that Ulay draws upon in this work.[54] He pierces his lower and upper lips once with a needle and thread and then ties a knot. Abramović, seated nearby, watches without intervening and then asks for questions to be directed towards Ulay. These questions are then answered by Abramović who apparently has extended her psychic connection to Ulay to a point where she attempts to answer as he would. The resulting question answer session is brief and is terminated as soon as Abramović feels the 'truth' of her responses diminished. It would appear that the couple are trying to project a fused sense of identity in which Abramović speaks for Ulay, his present condition preventing autonomous speech. Ulay as the self-styled masochist, appears dependent on Abramović to verbally communicate with the expectant audience. However, although Abramović is free from the physical pain and discomfort Ulay is presumed to be experiencing in his mute state, I would argue that Abramović is equally compromised by her attempts to subjugate her own subjectivity in favour of Ulay's. That is, Ulay not only places himself at the centre of attention (demonstrative feature) with his needlework, but the whole of Abramović's concentration is devoted to subordinating information regarding herself in order to sensitise herself to Ulay's (possible) thoughts and desires (provocative feature) and giving voice to his concerns. Whether Abramović's answers truly reflected what Ulay may have wished to communicate is not as important as Abramović's hypothetical self-annihilation. In this way, I would argue that a complex dynamic is set in motion whereby the masochistic action of Ulay is dependent on, and coterminous with, the simultaneous loss of subject

status of Abramović. Moreover, although Ulay forfeit's free linguistic expression and symbolically the Law of the Father, it may be argued that Abramović makes the greater sacrifice, only existing in the performance space as a projective screen for Ulay. This becomes significant when we consider the additional layer of their gendered identity, that is, Ulay, as a man, can masochistically 'voice' his protest through Abramović, and thus experiment with power-countering dynamics of masochism, but he does so, in this instance, at the cost of another person's (Abramović's) subject status.

One of the most well-known of the Ulay / Abramović combined works is their performance *Nightsea Crossing*. This performance was undertaken 90 times between 1981 and 1986 in a number of cities around the world including Sydney, Berlin, Cologne, Amsterdam, Ghent, Helsinki, Lisbon, Ushimado in Japan and Sao Paulo in Brazil.

> It meant crossing the ocean of the unconscious. For hours and hours we didn't do anything except sit at a table and look at each other. It opened the doors to perception to us and we were surfing different mental states.[55]

It was, by her own admission, one of their most challenging works. The piece consists of the two performers seated at either end of a long table facing each other. They remain in this position completely inert for the duration of the piece, which took place without interruption, throughout the gallery's opening hours (usually around 7 hours). The idea behind this was that the spectator would never see a beginning or an end to the performance and would thus only have an image or memory of their continuity, as if they might sustain this position indefinitely. Abramović and Ulay carried out this performance as:

> Their tribute to the cultures – Indian, Tibetan, Australian,

> Aboriginal – in which ceremonies and meditation techniques had been developed to take the practitioner close to the state of death.[56]

In order to survive this long painful performance it was necessary for the performers to be highly disciplined and able to mentally journey beyond their present circumstances. In effect they were practising a form of meditation that allowed them a degree of body transcendence as they understood it. This aspect of the performance was emphasised when a Tibetan Lama and an Australian aborigine joined them in Amsterdam during one of their later performances of this work. The concept for this performance came about as a result of spending nine months in the Australian outback deliberately exposing themselves to temperatures during the day that rose to the point where motion was no longer viable. Therefore much of their time was spent in absolute stillness. This was a discipline borne of necessity to cope with these specific conditions, but Abramović and Ulay wished to transport and transfer this concept back to the European context they had come from. This may have been construed as cultural appropriation but it is clear that rather than using these survival techniques for a performance gimmick the couple wished to bring the ideas behind such discipline to a Western audience with its obsession with the lack and waste of 'time'. The invitation or challenge to the audience was to participate in their stillness and psychic travels, but it is perhaps more likely that those observing would marvel at their tenacity and wonder at how they managed to sustain such a gruelling ordeal for so long. Such inertia is antithetical to a culture that places such emphasis on dynamism and change. The flesh body seated must have continually reminded them that it was still present. Having needs and pains enough to pull them back to their corporeal reality. Whereas their spiritual enterprise would seem to be aimed at alleviating them of the burden of the body, allowing them an unencumbered 'freedom' of the spirit. Ulay and Abramović achieve a kind of synthesis, a centred embodiment

/disembodiment that allows them to work beyond the an understanding of the body and mind as conflicting dualities. That is, Abramović believed they went beyond the limits of the corporeal body, chained as it is to sensation[57]. But for the spectator, they draw into sharp focus the relative nature of time. In this way the arbitrary nature of the time-based constraints we live by in Western society which dictate a rigid code of time-tabling and specific duration driven imperatives is highlighted, revealed as a product of our acculturated existence as members of a capitalist based economy where 'time equals money'. Consequently this performance may be interpreted as effecting a reversal, thereby exposing the viewer to the practice of everyday masochism undertaken by most of us who find ourselves running to keep pace with the clock's ticking. Observers come and go, impelled by pressures to be elsewhere, whereas this couple, self-contained and sealed off by their shared stare, live the moment, by the moment, apparently unperturbed by what occurs beyond their mutual vision. The performance highlighted how bound observers were by the sort of disciplinary regime expounded by Foucault. The stillness and extended duration of the performance, allowed Abramović and Ulay to be temporarily freed from the usual constraints of contemporary subjectivity.

The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk (1988) was the couple's final performance. For this work the two performers walked from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China towards each other a distance of some 1250 miles. Ulay began in the Gobi desert to the West (dry, heat) while Abramović started at Shanhaiguan by the Yellow Sea in the East (damp, cold), an area known as the dragon's head. The journey, begun on 30 March 1988, took three months to complete, taking each walker through mile upon mile of difficult and dangerous terrain. The walk was originally planned to investigate the relation between them and with "Mother Earth".[58] The performance was to end in a marriage ceremony but because the

relationship between the performers had deteriorated before the walk's commencement, they ended the walk at Er Lang Shan along with their twelve year partnership on the 27th June.

The walk would seem to be a symbolic act, pacing along the only man-made structure visible from space, to make a conjunction between east and west. A much grander gesture than an earlier piece that dealt with some similar themes *Communist Body / Capitalist Body*. This earlier piece was a symbolic and in some ways rather an idealistic performance that was carried out in their own home a day before their shared birthday, to an audience of invited friends and acquaintances. The unobtrusive centrepiece of this work was Ulay and Abramović's passports, which were taped together on a table near where the two performers lay in bed sleeping. Guests arrive, find their hosts asleep and after half an hour of waiting decide to open the bottle of Yugoslav champagne left out. The audience entertain themselves before gradually leaving some time later.[59] The title of the piece and the careful joining of their passports; their symbolic identities, would seem to indicate a concern with the meeting of disparity. Ulay, the German, and Abramović, the Yugoslav, brought together in intimacy, bodies born and raised under supposedly conflicting regimes. A reflection upon the divisions still existing at that time. Their apparently peaceful repose enacts and symbolises a harmony possible because of their mutual knowledge of each other as individuals, in contrast to documents like passports, symbols of national identity which may be used to stress nationalistic interests and arbitrary divisions between people. By placing products derived from Yugoslavia and Germany on separate tables, the audience, made choices about which products to use. The audience did not wake the performers, most did not even try. Instead the audience retained a symbolic distance from their private bodies despite the 'public' context of being invited guests. The reality of their

private peace thus remained in contrast to the public divisions symbolised by the tables. This performance appears to be less about exploring the limits of the ego and it's loss than it was a desire for borderless communion.

Solo

> Meditation, she explained, embodies a nascent politics: by emptying the mind and arriving at a state of non-thinking, one divests the self of societal conditioning and undergoes the mental preparation necessary to renegotiate the priorities of an information rich but spirit-poor society.[60]

The third period of Abramović's work, which brings us up to the present moment, maintains some of the concerns of her earlier periods, for instance in her desire to experiment and prove herself through acts of discipline and endurance. But the type of dynamic created between her and her audience has greatly altered. The type of interactivity that she has recently encouraged from her audience is not about the arguably necessary interventions of her early work, but is more about acts of communion. I am here referring to her Dragon series, a group of sculptures made in response to the *Great Wall Walk* and her interest in geomancy. This piece reflects a greater focus upon the creation of art objects, and a desire to produce something which has been primarily designed for the performer and audience to share, that is, Abramović has shifted her attention to encouraging the audience to actively involve themselves with her works[61]. The body of the artist is absent, but the viewer / participant instead occupies the vacant spaces in attempts at connection with the crystal and stone of the sculpture. It is suggested viewers should come to her installations in a meditative state of mind. This attitude of mind purportedly will allow the audience to adopt a meditative pose and the ability to attune themselves to the subtle vibrations of the crystal, metal and natural materials that she now uses to create

her art. Abramović hopes that this may allow visitors to experience her work and their own bodies in a quietly alternative manner.

Furthermore, Abramović runs many workshops that take place over a number of days and are designed to encourage the performer to experience time, space and the body in alternative ways[62]. It would seem that this approach has tended to encourage a more spiritual, shamanic interpretation of her creative process and working methods which have sometimes aligned her with New Ageism, a categorisation she refutes. Although she maintains a rigorous, disciplined body in order that her body, as she understands it, acts as a sensitive channel to thoughts and sensations that may inform her work, she resists been compartmentalised along with the recently fashionable crystal gazers. It would appear she is seeking to enlighten her viewers through the knowledge she has gained of herself and other cultural practices that employ meditation and endurance techniques.

In addition, Abramović is increasingly interested in creating distance between the artist and the audience, which would seem antithetical to the 1970s concern with the conflation of art and life. Abramovic's change in stance over this matter is reflected in the nature of her performance work. She now feels that "distance is more pure" and concedes that an audience can only be taken so far, at which point "you leave them behind".[63] The masochism she currently subscribes to is not the blood and cuts of her first period of performance, nor the repetitive assaults of the early years with Ulay, however she is still concerned with performances that look to the limits of physical and psychical experience, but is more likely to approach / achieve this through a thorough preparation of the mind and body and a paring down of the senses to acutely focus upon a single element that she feels is worthy of bringing to artistic light. Abramović does this

through periodic fasting, the exploration of visual deprivation and the practice of sustained meditation for days on end[64]. In this way she places herself outside the dictates of socio-cultural norms whose interests are invested in endless consumerism, speed and product.

> This is a question not of originality but of meaning. The meaning of the work can't flow if the originality of the work is seen as holy [...] The artist's name and originality are not important. Everything is built around the idea of the ego, and this prevents the work from having a proper life. The ego is an obstacle to the real experience of art.[65]

Furthermore, Abramović has become much less interested in the concept of originality and the way in which the endless quest for the novel feeds into the capitalist consumer machine. For example in the late 1990s, Abramović remade one of Pane's works as an installation called *Knife Ladder*. Pane's work was called *Escalade Sanglante* (1971) and Pane's original intention, as I mentioned earlier, was to demonstrate her sympathy for the Vietnamese during the American war by walking up and down a metal grid made with rungs edged with knives so that her feet were cut and bled.[66] Abramović does not perform on the ladder she has made, but its structure is an obvious echo of Pane's performance. Abramović's decision to make this ladder as an installation may be because Abramović is no longer interested in making new work that dramatically intervenes through the surface of the skin but is concerned with the symbolic resonances of disciplining the body through masochistic means. The ladder may be seen as both a tribute to Pane and a symbol of the painful challenges that require embracing in order to achieve heightened states of personal and performance awareness, as well as suggesting that the discipline required by masochistic acts can be a powerfully liberating means of transcending the more pedestrian aspects of contemporary existence in which 'everyday' repressive sado-masochism predominates and subjugates. This interest in re-cycling or re-imaging pieces from the past performance work of other artists might be

considered an extension of her *Biography* performance, where Abramović re-enacted selected and condensed extracts from her own performance history. Abramović has also expressed an interest in re-making the work of other artists, specifically Chris Burden's *Trans-Fixed* (1974).[67] In the light of performance art's usually transitory and ethereal presence, this interest in the re-creation of both her own and other artist's performance 'texts' suggests that it may be possible for performance art to approach the condition of drama. That is, that there is an available 'text' that can be transferred and re-performed by other artists who may use it "as a score".[68] But in this way the performance 'text' may itself become a tangible, commodifiable and exchangeable product open to many. Furthermore, this would seem to pose a challenge to the usual understanding of performance art as a very specific product of a particular artist/s, that is inherently irreproducible. If the performance is not carried out by the piece's originator can an actor, any actor, take their place? How does this effect the meaning of the piece? And can it still be considered performance art?

Abramović's supposition certainly occasions a reconsideration of both the question of the reproducibility of art works and whether the 'original' artist's 'presence' is a necessity. Abramović surmises that what is more important than originality is experience, that is, the process of the art making as experience. Thus Abramović reiterates the influence of Yves Klein's statement "my paintings are the ashes of my art" and confirms her belief that good art should attempt to remove itself from the notion of the ego and the limits such individualism places on artistic practice.[69] The idea of subsuming the ego continues to be an important aspect of Abramović's performance practise, and was pivotal to one of her less well known early works where she exchanged places with a prostitute for the day (1974). For this performance, she does not present her body undergoing any sort of ritualistic ordeal where pain or masochism appear overtly and are observable to an audience, but instead she risks an arguable greater

loss of ego by playing the part of a woman where her artistic identity means nothing and her only audience are the men she will service.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note how this concern with effecting a loss of ego, which she shares with some of the other artists I have been examining, in some ways mirrors the shamanic concerns of certain types of yogic practice outlined in a Sanskit text the *Pasupata Sutras.* The intention of this practice is to have the practitioner carry out inappropriate and potentially destructive behaviours that damage one's self-image sufficiently that the ego is all but effaced. In societies where such customs are practised, these shamans serve the community by becoming the legitimate focus of affliction, absorbing and removing social detritus. In the context of contemporary performance such actions may be meant to effect a similar sort of catharsis for the audience and because these activities are carried out voluntarily and with great devotion and physical rigour, they may to some degree be aligned with those who have carried out masochistic actions for the purposes of their religious vocation.

> The truth of the matter is that the Western adult is always made up already. To get at his true identity beneath the make-up is like peeling an onion to reach its kernel without knowing that it consists entirely of its layers of skin.[70]

In 1996 Abramović performed and videoed a piece called *The Onion.* This work is typical of her more recent desire to simplify the way in which she presents ideas. Abramović describes her working method as reductive. That is, initially she is struck by a myriad of ideas that may come to her during the course of her everyday existence, often ideas that she at first feels are outrageous. However, it is interesting to note that Abramović finds this quality of outrage adds a compulsive element to the idea so that she may well feel it must be developed in some form[71]. *The Onion* is a piece that has Abramović peeling and consuming

an onion. The simplicity of the idea is poetic, but the action itself is painful to perform and difficult to watch. The onion itself contains many surfaces, each at once dependent on and protective of the one underneath. Arguably these layers may be considered the many masks that make up identity. But the onion is made up of surfaces only, underneath what is inevitably revealed is the absence of a core. It is possible to argue that Abramović is using the onion to represent the lack of any definite, immutable subjectivity. That is, if we peel back the cultural constructions, the multiplicity of social personas we adopt and discard as and when necessary, we are faced with an emptiness, an absence behind the image projected. The deconstruction causes tears, Abramović cries as the layers are bitten into, masticated and swallowed, thus consuming the removed remnants of this representation. This action may be interpreted as a carrying out of a psychological dismemberment if the onion was understood to represent her acculturated self, and yet she might have merely peeled the onion, and this would have brought on the requisite tears and demonstrated her reduction to nothing. However, instead Abramović eats it, redoubling the masochistic imputations of this activity, painfully reincorporating the destroyed surfaces of her exposed psyche back into the body, destroying the evidence that exposed her. At once willing to reveal the superficiality of the onion by stripping it, but at the same time unwilling to tangibly keep the pieces for longer than it took to eat them. I would argue that this performance provocatively illustrates the socio-cultural construction of identity, but also the patriarchally sanctioned framework that requires continuous and repetitive acts of small-scale masochism to maintain the illusion of stable subjectivity fundamental to this structure.

By contrast, it could be argued that the artist's intentions performed through this piece may actually have been a confirmation of the necessity of such acts for the maintenance of the status quo. As Abramović does not see herself

articulating a feminist project of any description it is perhaps more likely that the later description is closer to her artist 'truth', however the piece remains an open text, in many ways because of its simple structure and execution.

Recently her work has caused controversy. In 1997 Abramović was invited by Peter Cukovic, the director of the museum in Montenegro and Yugoslav Commissioner to represent the former Yugoslavia at the Venice Biennale. However, because the former Yugoslavia is a country in which she is no longer a resident (Abramović is currently based in Amsterdam), there was a questioning of how an artist that hadn't lived in the country for years should be considered a suitable representative. This discussion took place in the Montenegrin and Serbian press. The Minister of Culture in the Montenegrin government Goran Rakocevic intervened believing that Abramović, an artist famed in Europe and America couldn't accurately represent "authentic art from Montenegro, free of any complex of inferiority".[72] The problem was resolved by putting forward another candidate. Abramović, however, received support and backing from the Italian Germano Celante the curator of the Biennale, who gave her ample space to set up her installation.

Her installation, or 'play', *Balkan Baroque* in fact ended up winning the Golden Lion. This piece consisted of three sections that occupied an entire floor of the Italian pavilion. The first of these sections projected images of her parents and their role as partisans as a backdrop and visual clue to Abramović's historical and personal positioning as a daughter of a Serb and a Montenegrin. This device also brings to light her own sense of being connected to the recent conflicts in this part of the world and her shame at what this connection imputes. In a second section she sings ethnic folk songs from Serbia and Romania as well as dancing to entertain her audience. In the third and largest room three

barrels containing water make reference to the sort of ritual cleansing necessary to free the body and the mind, while the centrepiece, a manifestation of truly baroque excess, is Abramović grieving atop a huge pile of bones which she studiously cleans, removing detritus. The sheer size of the pile distances her, she occupies a pedestal-like position, the blue backdrop encouraging comparisons with the traditional iconography of Madonna portraits. But rather than a cross or pomegranate clutched in a plump infants hand prefiguring events to come, Abramović holds and handles robust, stained and partially stripped bones further evoking the all too recent past. For the audience there is not only the image of a woman placed in the midst of an extraordinary mass of abject material but in addition the smell of these bovine remains must have powerfully contributed to Abramović's presentation, so that the pervasive and unavoidable stench became a heady reminder of decay and death.

This performance may be construed as radical and revealing. Culturally connected to a country that was divided by war in the 1990s, raw bones are a potent symbol of unresolved feelings and shallowly buried emotions. By cleaning the bones in public she plays in a liminal zone. She exposes the abject in removing the evidence of the extant body. Bones themselves have a clarity, a finality, but the clinging tags of flesh and gristle are discomforting, declare the freshness of the death. The cleaning action itself is disruptive. Why clean the bones? Why does she concern herself with removing what is left behind? Perhaps it is to dry out and give value to the evidence, to create a distance and allow an acknowledgement and assimilation of the past. In her interview with Chrissie Iles, Abramović talks about the bones and how their symbolism and meaning is totally dependent on the context in which they are presented. She notes that in Tibet and India bones have a very positive and spiritual aspect, however when they are translated to a European context, bones are the site of

shame and taboo. Abramović says she is "trying to question" this and "push it beyond the history of one country".[73] However, this is a difficult task for a western audience largely fearful of death, that ultimate loss of control. Whereas in other cultures, particularly those to which Abramović refers, death is embraced as part of the continuing cycle of life, the bones a symbol of transition. But if this is a masochistic performance, as I am claiming in including it here, what purpose does her masochism serve in a western context, both personally and politically? On both a personal and political level, by including images and testimony of her parents and their lives, Abramović reclaims her personal history. And by setting herself the task of cleaning bones she confronts the recent history of the Balkans. This part of the performance seems to simultaneously accept loss or Reik's notion of 'defeat', symbolised here by her direct contact with bones. Whilst her determination to deal with and make the bones 'clean' reveals that in spirit she remains undefeated, she has not submitted and is thus 'victorious' in Reik's terms. Within the context of the recent Balkans conflict this 'victory in defeat' may be read as a political declaration to continue, and the performance may be read as making a covert political statement which had resonance with her audience who at this time were no doubt acutely aware of the atrocities of this war. This example of Abramović's work also demonstrates that although much of Abramović's work appears concerned with achieving a personal efficacy, she is clearly able to communicate in a politically efficacious way too.

Conclusion

Abramović's work charts a number of changing developments both in her personal history and in the broader picture of contemporaneous politics and society that are pertinent to the historical and social placement of masochistic

performance practices. Abramović's concern with effecting a loss of ego has run like a continuous thread across and through her works in a way that is unique to this artist, but also important to my argument, because this desire to explore the limits of the ego and its loss may be interpreted in Freudian terms as a continually resurfacing need to enact a Fort/ Da scenario, that I argued in my introduction, was a means of controlling loss. Through Abramović's deliberate experimentation with firstly predominantly physically induced masochism and then psycho-physical masochism, Abramović effected many temporary losses of ego, which suggests that masochism as Abramović practices it, is one way of dealing with our essential singularity, our discontinuity.

Abramović remains interested in extending both physical and psychical limits through largely masochistic means. This has become both a personal quest for greater self-awareness and freedom, as well as an attempt to broaden the outlook of Western performance traditions. During the course of Abramović's performance history she has considered the body as a key to releasing the mind from its limiting corporeality. In contrast to a society anxious to reduce its levels of discomfort and displeasure, Abramović actively uses pain, restriction and deprivation in order to gain insight into her own personal limits and the limits of consciousness.

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[1] Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 1998, p12.
[2] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodem Condition,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, 1992, pp37-38
[3] See Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers,1967
[4] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972, Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude,*1992
[5] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* Vol.1, trans. Robert Hurley,1990, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1991.
[6] Judith Butler, 'Selections from *Bodies that Matter*' , *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader,* ed. Donn Welton, pp71-83, Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 1994, Susan Bordo, ' "Material Girl": The Effacements of Postmodern Culture', *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*,1995, pp245-275.
[7] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation*, trans. Foss, Patton and Beithman,1983.
[8] Marina Abramović in Lynn MacRitchie, 'Marina Abramović: Exchanging Energies', *Performance Research*, 1(2), 1996, "I could never do this alone. I

always need the public to look at me because the public creates an energy dialogue. You get an enormous amount of energy from the public to cross your physical and mental limits", p28.
[9] Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy,* 1979, p194.
[10] Chrissie Iles, 'Marina Abramović' interview, *Performance Research*, Vol.1, No.2,1996, "In my early solo performances nakedness wasn't the issue -it was my use of the communist star [...] But I never felt repressed sexually as a woman." p23.
[11] '68 and all that'
http://www.tao/ca/~freedom/1968/index.html
[12] Keith A Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968*, 1987, p8 and Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, 1970, p66.
[13] Herbert Marcuse, 'Repressive Tolerance', Robert Woolff, Barrington Moore Jnr, Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance,* 1969, p116.
[14] Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution : France in May 1968*, 1970, p62.
[15] Keith A.Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968*, 1987, p7.
[16] RoseLee Goldberg, Performance : live art since the 60s,1998, p20.
[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes,1974, p267.
[18] Marina Abramović, *Biography: In Collaboration with Charles Atlas,* Reihe Cantz series Ostfildern: Cantz,1994.
[19] Bojana Pelić, 'Being in the Body: On the Spiritual in Marina Abramović's art', *Abramović,* 1994, (Edition Cantz).
[20] Ibid., p33.
[21] Marina Abramović quoted by Thomas McEvilley, 'Stages of Energy: Performance Art Ground Zero?', *Artist / Body,* p15.
[22] Lynn MacRitchie, 'Marina Abramović: Exchanging Energies', *Performance Research*, Vol.1, No.2, 1996, p29.
[23] Ibid. p29.
[24] Thomas McEvilley, 'Stages of Energy : Performance Art Ground Zero?' in *Artist / Body*, 1998, p15.
[25] Janet A. Kaplan, 'Deeper and Deeper: interview with Marina Abramović', Art Journal, Summer 1999.
http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m0425/2_58/55427193/print.jhtml
[26] Thomas McEvilley, 1998, p15.
[27] Ibid., p15.
[28] Untitled Proposal for the Galereija Doma Omladine, Belgrade, 1970.
[29] Deborah Lupton, *Risk*, 1999, p49.
[30] With the exception of *Rhythm 10* which I later argue does use masochistic devices.
[31] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present,* 1999, p165. Michael Archer, 'Marina Abramovic', in *Art Forum*, Summer 1995, pp117-118, Tracey Warr, 'To Rupture Is To Find' in *Women's Art Magazine,* A Women's Art Library Publication, No.64, May/June 1995, p11.
[32] Thomas McEvilley, 1998, p25.
[33] Deborah Lupton,1999, p102.
[34] RoseLee Goldberg, 1999, pp144-147.
[35] Allan Kaprow quoted by Thomas McEvilley, 'Art in the Dark' , *Artforum,* Summer1983, p63.
[36] Thomas McEvilley, 'Art in the Dark',1983, p63.
[37] Ibid., p63.
[38] Ibid., p63.
[39] "Interview" with Chris Burden at www.artnode.se/frame.html
[40] Marina Abramović in interview with Helen Kontova, *Flash Art,* Vol.80-81,1978, p43.

[41] Thomas McEvilley, 1998, p15.
[42] Gina Pane quoted by Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s*, 1998, p27.
[43] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society,* 1996, p357-358.
[44] Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Geneva, Press Office, Gina Pane : "Tout ici ressemble à là-bas" rétrospective, 1965 -1987. http://members.tripod.co.uk/mamcogeneva/panee
[45] Kathy O'Dell, 1998 p36.
[46]Ibid., p36.
[47] Tracey Warr, 'Sleeper', *Performance Research,* Vol.1, No.2,1996, p4.
[48] François Pluchart, 'Risk as the Practice of Thought' *Flash Art,* Vol.80-81, 1978, pp39-40.
[49] Ibid. p40.
[50] See Lynn MacRitchie,'Marina Abramović : Exchanging Energies' *Performance Research*, Vol.1, No.2, 1996, pp27-34.
[51] Kathy O'Dell,1998, p27.
[52] Lynn MacRitchie,'Marina Abramović : Exchanging Energies' *Performance Research*, Vol.1, No.2, 1996, p29.
[53] Dokumenta 6, Kassel, June 1977.
[54] See Kathy O'Dell, 1998, p86.
[55] Marina Abramović, 'Time-Space-Energy or Talking about Asystemic Thinking' in *Artist/ Body,* 1998, p410.
[56] Lynn MacRichie, 1996, p31.
[57] Linda Weintraub, Arthur Danto, Thomas McEvilley, *Art on the Edge and Over : Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society*, 1996, pp62-63.
[58] 'Ghosts and Lovers on The Great Wall' http://sites.netscape.net/vanvalen/greatwall
[59] One guest, Wies Smals, in fact remained in the apartment and slept on the floor by the bed. "I didn't feel like being sociable in that respect as well as go away as was expected of me. Besides, I was a bit drunk and that's probably the reason I had the courage to stay without asking permission." Wies Smals quoted in *Artist / Body*, 1998, pp222-223.
[60] Jim Drobrick, 'Marina Abramovic', *High Performance,* Fall 1991, p67.
[61]Tracey Warr, 'To Rupture Is To Find', *Women's Art Magazine,* 1995, p12-13.
[62] See Ric Allsop and Scott deLahunta, eds., *The Connected Body? : an interdisciplinary approach to the body and performance,* (Amsterdam : Amsterdam School of Arts, 1996).
[63] Chrissie Iles's interview 'Marina Abramović' in *Performance Research,* Vol.1, No.2, 1996, p22.
[64] Tracey Warr, 'To Rupture Is To Find', *Women's Art Magazine,* 1995, p13.
[65] Ibid., p24
[66] Lynn MacRitchie, 1996, p28.
[67] Guy Hilton, 'Fifty is Just the Beginning', *Make,* December '96 / January '97, p4.
[68]Chrissie Iles, 'Marina Abramović', *Performance Research,* Vol.1, No.2, 1996, p22.
[69] Ibid., p22
[70] Michel Thevoz, *The Painted Body,*1984, p122
[71] Kathy Deepwell, 'An Interview with Marina Abramovic' , *N.Paradoxa* Issue 2, 1997. http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.parasoxa/abramov.htm, p2.
[72] 'Marina Abramovic: Venice Biennale 1997' http://www.dialnsa.edu/iat97/venice/FPP/abram.html
[73] Chrissie Iles,1996, p21.

FINLEY, INDECENCY AND THE N.E.A.

> Obscenity underscores the function of cultural norms, necessarily calling into question the threshold that delineates the accepted from the perverse.[1]
>
> Good art transforms pain into some compassionate attempt to understand it.[2]

In this chapter I wish to extend my argument to an examination of the sado-masochistic dynamics that I have suggested in my introduction are a structuring economy in society and culture. In order to do this I will address the work of Karen Finley. Finley is a performance artist, notable for the manner in which she aggressively confronts the public exposed to her performance with the "awfullest truth" on topics that are protectively grasped close to the heart of North American political and social life.[3] I am using Finley's work because I believe Finley exposes public complicity in sustaining dominant cultural norms that continue to subjugate the disenfranchised and minority groups, in particular people of colour, those living with H.I.V. or suffering from A.I.D.S. related illnesses, as well as the injustices experienced by women and children.

> She shrieks in raspy monotone, smothers her butt with yams, evacuates her diarrhea at the edge of the stage, dollops her nipples with sauerkraut.[4]

However, it was the unconventional, uncompromising and visceral means of delivery of her material that increased the anxiety of funding bodies like the National Endowment for the Arts (N.E.A.) and performance venues, when they were confronted with her unpredictable work. The coverage of Finley's performances in the media, would appear to express a fear of her unrestrained bodily performances and have labelled her work indecent and obscene: labels that were carefully affixed to her work in order to ensure that she was discredited and marginalised as an "unsocialized woman" supposedly unworthy

of the federal funds she was granted.[5] These factors have ensured that much of Finley's work has remained a site of contention. I will argue that Finley's work confronts dominant cultural norms for the behaviour of women, but more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, Finley shines a harsh white light on the mechanisms of sado-masochistic power that buttress and perpetuate power disparities. In addition, by addressing Finley's part in the N.E.A. debates which highlights how obscenity is defined in terms of aesthetics and the law, I hope to demonstrate how the debate over obscenity interfaces with the borders of masochism.

In the second half of this chapter I will support my supposition with an analysis of the content of a number of Finley's performance pieces which clearly demonstrate how Finley's work may be construed as utilising an 'obscene' and abject body for the purposes of underscoring the violent and non-consensual nature of sado-masochistic dynamics inherent in the quotidian experience of North Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. Finley's work usefully develops and clarifies my argument by enabling me to make a distinction between the creative potential of masochistic art practices that I believe embody a resistance, and self-perpetuating cycles of debilitating culturally sanctioned sado-masochistic power structures referred to in my introduction. I also include Finley because the range of her work includes published writing that deals with the dynamics of sado-masochism textually, while in performance she may perform a masochism of actions across the surface of her body that becomes a physical response to / manifestation of the implications of her sometimes masochistic and sometimes sadistically imputed words.

Funding the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts (N.E.A.) was established in 1965 during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. Its suppositional purpose was to encourage "artistic excellence" by supplying grants to individuals and arts organisations in order that particular projects could be undertaken.[61] The N.E.A.'s Declaration of Purpose states:

> it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government
> to help create and sustain [...] a climate encouraging freedom of thought,
> imagination, and inquiry.[7]

Submitted applications would first be assessed by the Solo Theatre Artist and Mime Fellowship Panel (later known as the Peer Panel), who would make recommendations from their knowledge of the artist's / organisation's work and their proposal. These applications would then be submitted to the 26 member National Council on the Arts and the N.E.A. chairperson, who would approve or occasionally reject these recommendations. Over the more than 33 year history of the N.E.A., only 20 grants out of nearly 110,000 awarded have been proved to be controversial.[8] An allocated grant might supply up to fifty percent of the cost of the proposed project. Additional funding therefore was necessary to make up the shortfall, but with the N.E.A. seal of approval contributions from private benefactors became easier to secure. As a result, this N.E.A. approval became an important factor for those seeking funding, and acted as a sort of insurance policy to those privately investing in the work or its promotion.

Since its inception in the mid-sixties in the U.S.A., considerable cultural anxiety has surrounded the federal funding of the arts. In the United States, freedom of speech is a constitutional right of the First Amendment, and as such is highly valued. This First Amendment stipulates that:

> Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.[9]

For many the idea of the government supplying money for some artists over others works against the notion of artistic freedom of expression unencumbered by the approval or disapproval of any governmental hegemony. An acceptance of federal funds for the production of art may already be considered a tacit curb on activity or restriction which should be avoided in order to retain the 'purity' of art, unsullied by any sort of covert or overt political imperative that may be implicitly associated with state money. For others, who also disapprove of federal funding for the arts, an argument arises from a very different concern that is based superficially on what is considered to be the proper use of tax-payers money. That is, should government revenue be spent on projects whose artistic merit and value can not be definitively calculated and recouped? In subsequent newspaper and articles in the *New York Times* the argument surrounding the issue of government funded art broadened to become a debate about what 'good' art really is[10]. And as Peggy Phelan notes, it is precisely a definition of good art that the new Right wing have failed to provide, despite their certainty concerning what is *not* good art.[11]

Furthermore, with the steady increase in the overall budget deficit for the United States government during the late 1980s and 1990s there was an increased tendency by government officials to scrutinise the funding priorities of the government.[12] The arts were deemed by many vocal and persuasive right wing members of Congress to be a superfluous expenditure that could be retained or spent more prudently elsewhere. However, it perhaps should be noted that although there was clearly increased concern with the spending of any public monies during this time because of the economic downturn that followed the

stock-market crash in the eighties, the articulation of a concern with arts spending also coincided with the increased visibility and assertion of the rights of minority groups (gays, people of colour) and women. At this time these groups had begun to feature more significantly in the media and art and were taking more active control over their representation in the public sphere. These factors, together with the moral panic resulting from the increasing presence of the A.I.D.S. virus in America and its association with gay men and Africans, led to a much closer scrutiny of the N.E.A. and the artists this organisation supported. This focus would seem to have been initiated by the new Right who had used their disapprobation of a 'homosexual lifestyle' and its renewed associations with illness and death, to insist upon the necessity of reasserting 'family values'. These values were allegedly based upon 'dominant cultural norms'. These norms include universal heterosexuality, motherhood (following a Christian marriage), nuclear family life, patriotism, loyalty to the flag, whiteness, as well as a secure, comfortable income and home. However, as Douglas Davis has pointed out, the current norm for families is anything but the dominant expectation. If the professed norm is considered to be a married heterosexual couple living together with their children, supported by a male breadwinner, then the fact is, according to the newspaper *USA Today*, only a quarter of all families fit this pattern.[13] This type of family is therefore not the actual experience of the majority of families in the United States and can not be consider the norm for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The rhetoric of 'family values' instead embodies a nostalgia for an idealised and largely fictitious past where clear boundaries, duties and gender roles provided the foundation of a stable society and art was predominantly concerned with the traditional aesthetics of classically defined 'beauty' and 'pleasure'.

The controversy over arts funding initially centred upon Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, a work exhibited as part of a 10 city touring exhibition for the work of artists who were given fellowship awards from the South Eastern Center for Contemporary Art, who in turn are funded by the N.E.A.[14] Following the exhibition, its catalogue came to the notice of Rev. Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association (A.F.A.). The A.F.A. has over 60,000 members throughout the United States, its declared purpose is "promoting decency in the American society and advancing the Judeo-Christian ethic in America"[15]. This group had already established themselves as censorious of the arts following their demonstrations against the screening of Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, (a film which depicts Jesus Christ as a sexual being with human failings), and for Wildmon's court case against the artist David Wojnarowicz, which Wojnarowicz won.[16] Wildmon, quoted in *The New York Times*, June 20th 1989 wrote that Serrano's image "should be fired", and in his widely distributed A.F.A. newsletter "circulation 380,000 of which 178,000 are churches"[17], he implied the work was blasphemous, without making any attempt to contextualise or interpret the work by a black 'mixed blood' artist who is a Catholic-raised believer. Andres Serrano describes himself as of mixed blood because he has a Chinese great grandfather, a Spanish father and an Afro-Cuban mother.[18] Wildmon used this opportunity to urge his readers to contact their representative and express their displeasure with the N.E.A. Furthermore, as Phelan has noted, arts advocates did not rise to the challenge and offer an informed alternative reading of the image.[19] This omission lost them an important opportunity to inform the public about the artist and relocate Serrano's work within contemporary art practice. In fact it was not until April 1990 when Lucy L. Lippard had her article 'Andreas Serrano: The Spirit and The Letter' published in *Art in America* that any sort of contextual reading was given to Serrano's work. It is important to note that Serrano himself is reported as seeing

Piss Christ as "a protest against the commercialization of sacred imagery."[20] However, this reading of the image, given by the artist himself, is never addressed by his right wing Christian critics.

The image, which in itself looks ethereal and inoffensive, easily ignited Wildmon's ire with its title. Senator Alfonse D'Amato (Republican - New York) took up the issue by criticising the photo, demanding new guidelines for the N.E.A. and in a truly theatrical gesture, tore the exhibition catalogue to pieces on the floor of the Senate, thus fuelling the small but steadily growing fire beginning to lick at the alternative edges of the N.E.A. in a way that would not only jeopardise their budget and compromise their autonomy with new restrictive legislation, but would call into question their continued existence as a national funding body. Right wing religious leaders, including Pat Robertson, criticised Serrano's work. Robertson did this by using his Christian Broadcasting Network to decry the work and encourage viewers to place pressure on Congress to terminate their support of the N.E.A. with tax-payers money until the public could be certain that the funding of art like Serrano's was an impossibility. Already the N.E.A. has been subjected to numerous budget cuts and freezes since the initial controversy surrounding Serrano. For example, for the Financial Year (F.Y.) in 1993 the budget was 175 million dollars, but for the F.Y.1999 the budget was 98 million dollars. It is also worth noting, that the American public annually pay less than a dollar per person to fund the arts, a figure which is often compared to the much more generous per capita allocations to cultural enterprises in many European countries or to the budget appropriated by the American defence or penal system.[21]

Later in 1989 a major retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe's work, *The Perfect Moment,* was mounted following his death from an A.I.D.S. related illness.

Mapplethorpe was a problematic figure for the new Right not only because he was open about his homosexuality and his H.I.V. positive status, but he continued to produce photographs, artistically noteworthy because of their formalist beauty, that carefully focused on the homosexual male body and aspects of human sexuality that had rarely been dealt with in an art world context through the medium of photography. He dared to show the beauty of homosexual love and lovemaking that included an experience of pain. I would argue that it was this challenge to a bipolar understanding of sensation dominant in contemporary culture that clearly separates pain from pleasure that added to the negative reception of his work in some quarters. Mapplethorpe's work surfaced in a social climate that was struggling to deal with rising numbers of A.I.D.S. related deaths. But even if illness and death were possibilities, Mapplethorpe revealed these things in a light that expressed an unsettling poignancy. Mapplethorpe's work suggested that homosexuality did not have to be equated with death and disease when the death of homosexuality and a return to the implied safety of universal heterosexuality was the covert and sometimes overt agenda of the new Right.

The Mapplethorpe exhibition, in part funded by a $30,000 grant, was due to open at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C. on the 1st July 1989 during its tour. A small number of Mapplethorpe's early works, which depicted gay sex and sadomasochistic paraphernalia and iconography, were added by the Institute for Contemporary Art a few days before it opened. The gallery director Christina Orr-Cahall, unsettled by the recent controversy over Serrano and not wishing to imperil the Corcoran's N.E.A. funding support, used these new additions as an excuse to cancel the exhibition, unaware that this act of censorship would be financially and spiritually devastating for the Corcoran, as enraged artists and arts advocates withdrew support and private funding for the gallery and its now

shattered credibility. It was in the wake of the relocated Mapplethorpe exhibition that the new Right, this time personified in the figure of Senator Jesse Helms, grasped the mantle of 'public decency' to attack another dimension of N.E.A. funded work - performance art.

Karen Finley's original defunding came about as a direct result of being maligned in the press by the columnists Robert Novak and Rowland Evans, henceforth she was labelled the "chocolate-smeared woman"[22]. It was through this article that Finley came to the notice of Jesse Helms. Helms, still enflamed by the exhibiting of the work of Mapplethorpe and Serrano with federal funds, used his government position to scapegoat four performance artists. The newly appointed chairman John Frohnmayer became the first victim of the fear Helms initiated, by making a decision to cancel funding for the Nan Goldin exhibition, *Against Our Vanishing,* after realising that this exhibition dealt with homosexuality and A.I.D.S. related death. And although the gallery held onto the money (when it eventually arrived) and Frohnmayer reversed his decision, he clearly demonstrated where his loyalties lay and that he was really influenced by the censorious discourse of men like Helms. In an attempt to offer an explanation Frohnmayer's initially said "that 'political realities' made it likely he would have to veto some grants recommended by panels of artists"[23]. So, in 1990, following a performance of *We Keep Our Victims Ready*, Finley was informed that the NEA was withdrawing from funding her work. Finley, together with two gay and one lesbian artist, (Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, John Fleck collectively referred to as the N.E.A. 4) found themselves placed outside the 'decent', amidst accusations of 'obscenity'.

> What masquerades as a debate about obscenity merely disguises a more deep-seated struggle between white, mainstream America and marginalised groups challenging the former's position of power.[24]

Tim Miller and John Fleck, do not appear as such anomalies in this context, for the furore over the Mapplethorpe exhibition exposed what Phelan saw to be a discomfort with any representation of the male that exposes a vulnerability to penetration.

> Gay men implicitly 'feminize' all men which is why they arouse such hatred[25]

This apparent feminisation is a further extension of a reversal of gaze. The nude male body including visible, exposed genitalia, has increasingly become an object of display. If we exclude the ancient Greeks, the position of nude-on-display had, until the 1970s, been held almost exclusively by women, who are considered the 'natural' object of artistic vision for the presumed heterosexual male consumer. To photographically or performatively exhibit the unveiled male body was to break a taboo that has protectively shrouded the penis. That is, because the penis is inevitably associated with phallic power (in spite of Lacan's attempts to separate the two), to reveal it and thus unveil it's vulnerability, becomes potentially disruptive. However, if the penis *is* represented it must be presented in an active rather than passive state; to do otherwise is likely to be construed as 'indecent' and 'obscene' because, again, the passive state is aligned with femininity.

To display the male body is to acknowledge the female gaze and her desire, which may be seen as threatening enough, but what the religious Right evidently found even more disturbing was the male gaze inscribing homosexual desire into these images. This development in (particularly photographic) imagery of the male since the 1970s is coupled with a clear display of anxiety aroused by the increased visibility and vocality of openly gay men. This concern has been disguised as a paternalistic concern for male youth, who were anticipated to be

perverted by viewing ideas or images that related to a homosexual 'lifestyle'. Moreover, a number of politicians, including Pat Buchanan, have publicly expressed their concern over homosexuals occupying public office.[26] Buchanan is well known for his outspoken anti-gay rhetoric:

> The gays yearly die by the thousands of AIDS, crying out in rage for what they cannot have: respect for a lifestyle Americans simply do not respect; billions for medical research to save them from the consequences of their own suicidal self-indulgence. Truly, these are lost souls, fighting a war against the Author of human nature, a war that no man can win.[27]

Holly Hughes, as a lesbian, was a rather more unusual choice, as lesbian women and a lesbian 'lifestyle' have traditionally been rendered virtually invisible, through the absence of the penis and thereby any means to phallic 'power' as it is understood under patriarchy. According to the psychoanalytic logic of the dominant cultural norm of heterosexuality, sexuality is centred around the phallic signifier and is embodied in the penis, and although, as I explain in chapter four, the possessor of phallic power may not be the possessor of the penis, there is, as Jane Gallop has argued, often a conflation of the two, particularly in sexual relations.[28] Therefore, under these conditions, for two physically female bodies, desire is rendered impossible because penetration is (apparently) impossible. This attitude, apart from displaying a huge lack of imagination, reflects how the phallic power structures still eclipse alternative sexual practices. However, the higher profile accorded to lesbian sexuality and sexual practices acquired primarily through the introduction into mainstream media of lesbian characters and personalities, has meant that lesbian women are now a significant target of censure.

Finley, with her aggressive style and 'unfeminine' behaviour, has had herself and her work aligned with lesbianism however inaccurate an assessment that is of Finley's work or lesbianism. 'Offensive' language, when it comes from the

mouth of a male, is more often interpreted as an expression of high spirits, especially in the context of comedy. It is often considered an affirmation of masculinity - the butt of the joke often being women, people of colour or gays. However, I would suggest that when a woman uses language in this way in a public sphere she herself may become the target of personally directed criticism pertaining to her social status, her mental stability and/ or her sexual morality. Unless, that is, the language is used in a self-deprecating manner, in which case it may be tolerated.[29] The disparate reaction to 'offensive' language use by men and women demonstrates how the masculine order effectively retains 'ownership' of certain expressive language forms.

In addition, Karen Finley's alignment with lesbian sexuality is additionally derived from the perceived aggression she expresses in her work. In order to emphasise societal ills and the sorts of violence perpetuated against women and minority groups, she takes on the mantle of the perpetrator - speaks with their voices, and their language in the fashion of a medium possessed. Her previous work has been described by Lynda Hart as cathartic, but this seems to be a very masculine interpretation of her sort of dramatic or performed tension.[30] There does not seem to be any single moment of climax - at least not for the spectator who remains in a constant state of nervous anticipation and suspense: what will she do next? Who will be the next target? Furthermore, catharsis implies a release and yet Finley has no intention of letting go of her anger and frustration with injustice. In an interview with Andrea Juno, published in *Angry Women*, Finley says "revenge can be art"[31]. She has no time for the "forgiving and forgetting" character of Judeo-Christian morality, because she believes there is an inherent duplicity in the idea of attempting to forget about something that has potentially irreparably altered or damaged another person.[32] Indeed, Finley told Juno that she believes this is why some find her work so compelling, because

she isn't afraid to bring to light the pain of peoples past or childhood experiences. In this sense, this work may provide an opportunity for audience identification for those who may have shared a similar destructive situation, but it provides no release for those who carry the guilt, tum a blind eye or would like to erase their own or others memories of the past. This attitude placed Finley in conflict with certain, still widely accepted, western cultural ideas of what constitutes appropriate female behaviour and roles, that is, that a woman must yield, bend and comply as daughters, wives and mothers. I would suggest that these factors contributed to an understanding of Finley's work as 'unnaturally' aggressive and made her the most rigorous target of the N.E.A. censorship, almost as if being 'unpleasantly' assertive was in itself a mark of abnormality or lesbianism. This alignment merely underscored the homophobic nature of the whole N.E.A. controversy.[33] Additionally, because Finley is heterosexual and, as such, attacks from within the patriarchal establishment, she may be understood as more of a threat than those that are already perceived as sexual 'outsiders' or exiles from this economy.

As I have outlined, the work of Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, John Fleck and Tim Miller (N.E.A. 4) were singled out amidst accusations of obscenity and indecency.[34] However, it soon became clear that this accusation was merely a ruse fabricated to obscure the discomfort and anxiety experienced by certain individuals and organisations, like the A.F.A., when faced with challenging artistic material that presented politically engaged criticism of government and social policy, as well as alternative sexual representations of gendered identities that stand apart from those perpetuated by dominant cultural norms. The controversy led to the withdrawal of N.E.A. grants for these four artists and was the catalyst for long years of debate between Finley's original de-funding in 1990 and the final ruling over the subsequent court cases made in 1998.

Following the initial defunding, Helms used his position in government, together with public support generated by misrepresentations of the work of the N.E.A. 4 by a significant and influential percentage of the media, to agitate for the introduction of an amendment to current legislation regarding the federal funding of the N.E.A. Helms justified his actions by proclaiming that the U.S. government was not prepared to fund obscenity and indecency, but what it really revealed was his thinly veiled homophobia and apprehension over an overt physical expression of female sexuality. This amendment, which reads as a virtual transcription of Jesse Helms original proposal written during the Mapplethorpe controversy, states that N.E.A. funding must not be given to support:

> obscene materials including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts or material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion; or material which denigrates, debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin.[35]

Artists were compelled to sign a contract that gave an assurance that the artist would not use the grant money to produce 'obscene' or 'indecent' art. Artists saw this introduction as unconstitutional, an infringement of their First Amendment rights. A legal battle ensued which resulted in a retraction of the amendment, which was originally passed at a poorly attended Senate session on July 26,1989. However, in the process, a great deal of fear and uncertainty was generated within the artistic community. Sali Ann Kriegsman director of the N.E.A. dance program was quoted:

> I would have preferred a totally clean bill. Right now the language has an awful lot of fear in it. I've already heard people saying they fear self-censorship, question themselves: Am I going to get in trouble if I do this? Should I exhibit this? [36]

The fire was now a blazing inferno but one that had a "chilling" effect on arts organisations nation-wide.[37] This was the description used to express the effect signing such a contract might have on artists who apply for funding. This sort of contract recalls those signed against engagement in allegedly 'un-American' activities during the McCarthy era. This uncertainty partly arose over the wording of the amendment which, as Carole Vance points out, interspersed illegal practises such as child pornography, with legal ones, like sadomasochism and homoeroticism. This conflation effectively condemns by association. The new Right's clever use of language had a formidable effect on people's interpretation of the new legislation. Carelessly read, one could understand the legislation to imply that ALL depictions of sadomasochism and homoeroticism are obscene. In addition there have been several attempts by men like Jesse Helms to interfere and blur the issue at question, creating further fear and uncertainty among arts practitioners and even the N.E.A. chairperson John Frohnmayer who had already cancelled funding for the Nan Goldin exhibition *Witnesses:Against Our Vanishing* because of his anxiety about the content of the exhibition. This decision was reversed, but Phillip Pearlstein wrote in 'An Artists Case' :

> Cryptically, but ominously, Sen. Helms had the last word, telling the New York Times on November 17 1989 following the restoration of the grant, that he hoped Frohnmayer was not "retreating from his voluntary commitment to me".[38]

Artists became wary of being forced to tolerate value judgements they did not adhere to. For instance, in March 1990 Senator Helms announced that he believed the N.E.A. had contravened N.E.A. regulations by funding "three acknowledged lesbian writers".[39] There was no evidence to suggest that there was anything 'obscene' or indecent about the nature of their artistic expression, but there remained the suggestion that just to be openly gay was to be obscene.

Vance believes this is how the new Right effectively determined what obscenity had come to mean in common parlance, even though this meaning has no bearing on the legal definition of the obscene and goes against what would normally be accepted as such. The legal definition of 'obscenity' relies on the three stipulations of the Miller Standard. The Miller Standard criterions are as follows:

> 1/ the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest [translation: 'prurient interest' here means that the work leads to sexual arousal], and 2/ the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specified by the statute, and 3/ the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.[40]

Vance therefore suggested that the best defence for artists and arts organisations is education, that is, a knowledge of what the limits really are according to this legislation.

The Helms Amendment, once retracted, was replaced by new stipulations. The N.E.A., in addition to funding artists whose work displays "artistic merit and excellence" must "take into consideration general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public"[411]. The new provision Section 954 (d) (1) reads

> No payment shall be made under this section except upon application therefor which is submitted to the National Endowment for the Arts in accordance with regulations issued and procedures established by the Chairperson. In establishing such regulations and procedures, the Chairperson shall ensure that-
> [2] (1) artistic excellence and artistic merit are the criteria by which applications are judged, taking into consideration general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public[42]

The notion of "general standards of decency" or "community standards" as it is referred to in the Miller Standard for considering what is obscene, makes the amendment uncertain and virtually untenable because of the lack of clarity or "vagueness", which led to the amendment being contested as unconstitutional on issues concerned with First and Fifth Amendment rights. That is, that the new statute was impermissible for vagueness and that it also imposed content restrictions which contravenes a citizen's right to freedom of speech. The concern about vagueness is based on the principle that:

> A law must give fair notice of its mandate. Because we assume that man is free to steer between lawful and unlawful conduct, we insist that laws give the person of ordinary intelligence a reasonable opportunity to know what is prohibited, so that he may act accordingly.[43]

An initial court judgement ruled in their favour, but in 1998 this ruling was reversed. The issue of vagueness was primarily concerned with the notions of "decency and respect", but this ruling was upheld in the second hearing because the idea of "decency and respect" had only to be "taken into consideration" and therefore it was considered that the primary emphasis would remain focused on "artistic excellence and artistic merit." Vagueness remains significant because it basically means that applicants will still be considered in terms of 'decency', but a decision on this matter will depend entirely on the composition of the review and peer panels and their attitudes to this issue. This is consequential because, in order to fulfil the criteria of the amendment which calls for "respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public", the N.E.A. decided to redress the composition of the panel review board to include people from the wider community rather than just arts specialists. This effectively meant that people assigned to the panel may have had little direct experience of art and/ or performance, and that they are required to evaluate the 'artistic' value of potential projects presented to them. Ultimately power remains

with these council members interpretative understanding of the statute under the leadership of the N.E.A. chairperson. This elected community may or may not take into consideration the arguable point, that the work of any of these artists, including Finley, has little shock value compared with the plethora of X-rated and hardcore videos that are readily available to any person of age who may seek to watch them. Douglas Davis notes that a TIME magazine report in 1989 reported that 100 million X-rated videocassettes were rented by American men and women.[44]

Many are concerned that by including members of the 'general public' on the panel, artistic freedom may be further restricted because of the perceived tendency to favour the familiar and conventional over the more challenging and/ or extreme proposals. In addition, prescribed 'community standards' will dictate a particular attitude from individual panellists. And standards are just as likely to vary from people chosen from different demographic and ethnographic groups within a state, as they are to vary from state to state. The power, at this point, is clearly going to be retained by those appointed to panel. A fact that neither side seems entirely happy with, for instance Justice Scalia, an advocate of strictly controlled funding, felt the new legislation effectively relinquished control:

> "The operation was a success, but the patient died." What such a procedure is to medicine, the Court's opinion in this case is to law. It sustains the constitutionality of 20 U.S.C. 954(d)(1) by gutting it.[45]

However, the new chairman William Ivey seemed content and was quoted by *The Newshour with Jim Lehrer* reacting to the Supreme Court's decision upholding the N.E.A. decency standards.

> Well, we were very pleased, because it certainly affirmed the overall procedures that the agency uses in terms of its grant review process and also I think gave the agency the latitude that it needs to really apply the diverse standards that Americans bring

to looking at the arts.[46]

However, Douglas Davis points out in his article 'Arts and Contradiction: Helms, Censorship and the Serpent', that what is really at issue here is the control of funds and the control over cultural production. That is, that Congress is less concerned with the moral integrity of the general population than it is with having power over the distribution of this money, and, therefore, a say in what is produced. I would argue that the general population do not wish the government to have greater control over what materials are made available to them. In a Gallop poll whose results were published in the 2nd July *Newsweek* in 1990, it was revealed that 71% believe there has been an increase in obscenity in the arts, 78% think that parents should take more responsibility for protecting their children from obscenity, but 75% did not want new legislation restricting what they could view or hear.[47] In fact, I would argue that the American public are guilty of a certain amount of duplicity. Although there has been a general expression of distaste voiced in relation to the work of artists like Mapplethorpe, Serrano and Finley, the actual demand to view such works has increased. For example, following the Corcoran cancellation, the next location, Boston, that exhibited Mapplethorpe's work, drew unprecedented crowds. It seems that these works and others like them are greeted with enthusiasm providing it is not taxpayer money that has gone into supporting their production or exhibition.

I will now go on to analyse a number of Finley's performances to demonstrate how Finley's work may be interpreted as exposing the raw underside of contemporary sado-masochistic society in a way that uses the 'obscene' and the abject body to powerful advantage. For instance, in *We Keep Our Victims Ready* Finley tells a series of stories, she recounts many of them as if they were half-truth, half-surreal fantasy. Finley is being intentionally provocative, deliberately angry. In her interview with Juno, Finley expresses the hope, that in this way,

she will arouse a response that initiates action or heightened awareness from the spectator. During each monologue she adopts the persona of the speaker male or female. Her metamorphosis is achieved through a characteristic performing style that Finley has likened to becoming a medium - a channel through which multiple impulses may pass[48]. In Finley's case, these impulses tend towards a consideration of sadistic and masochistic power struggles enacted through the body. And rather than errant spirits being the locus of her mediumistic 'exorcism', it would seem that it is the attitudes and behaviours of the American public that she wishes to see addressed or changed.

Finley's performance style and delivery deliberately blur distinctions between herself and her adopted persona. In the resulting confusion of categories enacted across and through the body of Finley, Finley could be said to be staging the 'obscene'. Finley slips through speech, returning again and again to the bodily penetration of both sexes, crossing and re-crossing gender and familial boundaries; passing fluids, daubing substances or sexually evocative residues on herself, her psyche and her body that purposefully evoke the abject. Finley toys with mutable boundaries and liminal substances in a way that suggest the fragility of border categories and actively disrupts notions of the "clean and proper" body that enables the subject to differentiate itself and allows boundaries to form distinguishing the inside from the outside of the body.[49] In this way I believe Finley underscores the precarious state of traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women and others, particularly attitudes that surround 'desirable' forms of masculinity and female sexuality. This places her work outside the still dominant, traditional cultural norms assigned to women which lauds passivity and compliance in sexual and social relations, and promotes a fixed and stable gender identity.

Woman as Object

On numerous occasions in her writing Finley draws attention to a mindless sadistic misogyny she sees to be endemic in contemporary Western society. For instance, in 'St Valentine's Massacre', a part of Finley's performance *We Keep our Victims Ready,* Finley speaks graphically about sex from a male perspective and in the process reveals a slang-ridden crassness, where euphemisms serve to further objectify women:

> Sure, I've eaten a doggie out / Sure. I've eaten a doggie out /
> 'Cause I'm a man. Nothing better. / I'll eat dog pussy 'cause I'm
> a pet lover.[50]

I would argue that Finley's speaker linguistically reduces women to the level of a barely acceptable pet, a misogyny that rewrites the female as animalistic sexual organ only tolerated because it can be consumed. And that in carrying out this consumption he reasserts his manhood, almost as if he is carrying out his duty. In this way, Finley draws attention to the ugliness and pain of the sort of socially-sanctioned sado-masochistic power dynamics that objectify and berate women.

In another monologue 'I'm an Ass Man' from *A Certain Level of Denial* , Finley recounts the crude gritty underside of rape. It is an expression of the commonplace brutality, objectification and fear of the female body:

> I crack open the seat of her pants, just listening to the fabric tear. I love the sound of ripping polyester. I love the smell of ass in open air. Then I get my fist, my hand, and I push myself up into her ass. I'm feeling the butt pressure on my arm, on my waist, it's feeling good [...] just when I'm ready to mount her, I take my hand out. I see my arm, my hand, and I see that THE WOMAN HAS HER PERIOD. How could you do this to me, woman? How could you do this to me? How could you be on the rag on me? I'D BE THE BEST FUCK IN YOUR LIFE! THE BEST PIECE OF COCK IN YOUR LIFE, GIRL! THE BEST RAPE OF YOUR LIFE!. Be a long time before I use that hand to shake my dick after I piss.[51]

Using the language of the male conquerer "I crack open the seat of her pants [...]I push myself up into her ass [...] I'm ready to mount her," she subverts masculine bravado and swagger, because by speaking 'his' words as she imagines he would describe this encounter, the bragging is revealed as a veneer, covering the empty and ridiculous posing of a male who has fully objectified his female victim through ignorance and fear. The violence of this sadistic invasion of the female body/ object is underscored because it is still a woman speaking these words. And even more than Finley's audacity to speak as a male, is the tacit awareness of many in her audience that there is a recognisable 'truth' in what she is portraying. For some viewers, blood on the penis may well produce a Freudian interpretation of this image as evoking castration anxiety. There are a multitude of associations and anxieties that surround blood that I consider elsewhere (Chapters 4, 5 & 6). However, in this context woman's blood is seen to be polluting, and sex with a menstruating woman is forbidden in many religious scriptures, underlining the deep cultural discomfort that circulates around this body function. Scriptural prohibitions exist in the Bible (Leviticus 15: 19-33), the Koran and in the Torah[52]. It is also interesting to note that a statement issued by Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman in the 1970s, stills goes to every couple who apply for a wedding license. This statement reiterates the necessity of avoiding sexual intercourse during menstruation. Although this is not always practised in contemporary Western society, I wish to suggest that for some, there may be a residual sense of transgression or dis-ease associated with having intercourse with a menstruating woman.

Finley's hypothetical situation thus becomes darkly comic: a man, clearly constructing himself as potential conqueror of his chosen object, finds that his bodily explorations reveal a weapon (menstrual blood) that terrifies and deters

him from further action. It is difficult for an audience to stomach such blunt presentation of potentially 'real' situations and for them to acknowledge elements of truth in Finley's words, for this is also to acknowledge a level of societal complicity and a general awareness of the sorts of sadistic practices (rape) that take place on a daily basis. The work is potentially challenging to all, but what has provoked most actual censure in this instance is the breaking of the taboo that forbids as 'obscene' a portrayal of men that paints them as almost laughable victims of their own uncontrollable desires and violence. I would like to suggest that what may be understood as a critical objection to Finley's graphic description of rape, may actually be a deep discomfort with Finley's harsh, almost satirical ridicule of an extreme manifestation of masculine power.

The dearth of feeling Finley sees as characteristic of late 20th century men is a theme she repeats again and again in her writing and performance work, emphasising her concern that the heterosexual male is acculturated by prevailing norms to divorce sentiment ; "I'm a military kind of guy. / I saw a guy shoot himself / happened to be my dad."[53] and that this ultimately leads to social and political abuses.

> Ain't got a friend, but I got a drinking partner. Ain't got a confidante but I got a hunting buddy. Ain't got a shoulder to cry on, but I got a shoulder to carry a gun.[54]

Finley here reinscribes a cliché: 'actions speak louder than words'. The actions, (drinking, hunting, and carrying a gun) are 'naturally' equated with masculinity, and are seen to virtually drown out any voice that may wish to discuss a problem or share a thought. Finley's work highlights how these cultural norms for male behaviour are reinforced and perpetuated in society. In this way, she critiques the forces of socially-sanctioned masochism directed against men, which constrict men and effectively stunt the emotional response of the male in

society. His pleasure must be derived from his triumphant insularity, his sense of control and his ability to override feeling. Finley's work emphasises that both men and women are oppressed by the many unchallenged aspects of prescribed 'masculine' behaviour. That is, that we are all subject to the repressive and restrictive forces (or pain) of socially-sanctioned masochism felt to be essential to the maintenance and 'desirable' functioning of society and subjectivity (pleasure).

The Exposed Body

> No nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling, even although it be only the faintest shadow - and if it does not do so, it is bad art and false morals.[55]

How do we interpret the naked female form when it is presented on stage with an audience present? For many, like Kenneth Clark, the placement of an exposed body on display cannot be discussed without acknowledging the presence of sexual desire. But for Roland Barthes a naked woman on stage is no longer a sexual object, but a thing that has somehow achieved a renewed state of chastity through the casting aside of decorative vestments and superfluous props Barthes presumes are designated for the male gaze.

> Through a shedding of an incongruous and artificial clothing, nakedness as a natural vesture of woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of the flesh.[56]

But does this nudity cast aside her subjectivity too, redress her as object, nature, or something animalistic? Her naked flesh, essentialised and almost automatically comparatively placed against contemporary visions of 'desirable' (i.e. hegemonic) female anatomical proportions, like that presented by Clark in

his now classic interpretation of the nude, with its covert rewriting of the female body as something akin to what Nead describes as a phallic form:

> At no point is there a plane or an outline where the eye may wander undirected. The arms surround the body *like a sheath*, and by their movement help to emphasise its basic rhythm. The head, left arm and weight-bearing leg form a line as firm as *the shaft of a temple*.[57]

Clark attempts to formulate a rational geometry that effects a fragmentation of the female body, and in so doing orders her excess sexuality into a framework of desirable and containable shapes:

> A shape, like a word, has innumerable associations which vibrate in the memory, and any attempt to explain it by a single analogy is as futile as the translation of a lyric poem. But the fact that we can base our arguments either way on this unexpected union of sex and geometry is a proof of how deeply the concept of the nude is linked.[58]

How is our acculturated understanding of women's bodies important to Finley's work? Do we lose sight of her face when confronted with the rest of her? How significant is that loss (if it is a loss) to her work? And how does her performing body compensate? Does it need to? What meanings does her exposed body convey? Linda Nead has argued that the use of the female nude in art has been an attempt to contain and control women's bodies, and that in order for a depiction to be accepted, it was necessary for the female body to appear seamless, that is, a closed form, without orifices that may allow seepages between the inside and the outside of the body. Thus to depict 'naked' reality with all its sights, smells and secretions is already a transgressive act. In 'Yams Up My Granny's Ass' Finley does not perform naked, but she does pull her pants down and expose her bottom. This act alone presents a number of problems for both female and male viewers, but the controversy and debate surrounding this performance centred upon her action of smearing her buttocks

with yams, or as described in Lynda Hart's article 'Reconsidering Homophobia' the emphasis of subsequent correspondence in the *Voice* was on:

> "debating whether or not Finley inserted the yams into her anus, whether the yams were cooked or uncooked, and whether it was possible to insert uncooked yams." [59]

Attention focused not so much on the unveiled female flesh as on the transgression of a bodily boundary, the exploration of the liminal zone between the inside and outside and as Hart points out, a boundary or entry point chiefly associated with homosexuality. The fact that she was partially naked suddenly was of secondary importance.

In *A Constant State of Desire* Finley plays with prescribed notions of performative femininity by approaching the stage in the guise of a neatly turned out, middle-class American woman. The adoption of this costume emphasises the shift she makes when she launches into her accusatory, invective speeches after taking her clothes off. The spectator's expectations have been subverted. The nude female traditionally presented as an object for the heterosexual male's visual consumption turns on the voyeur and ridicules him. In the second act Finley uses her body as constructive surface. Using a bag of smashed eggs as glue and small soft animal toys as glue brushes, she decorates herself with small coloured paper pieces and glitter until her entire body appears like some extraordinarily wrapped candy - the female body for delectation. To consume and be consumed. The paper boas, as final additions, highlight the performative nature of her femininity and add a fetishistic dimension. The bagged-up eggs and soft toys may here refer to the pre-inscription of maternity on the female body, their violent destruction potentially evocative of a bizarre cosmetic or a Bobby Baker-esque cookery demonstration. Additionally, this destruction of eggs may be read as an essentialist reading of women as reduced to their reproductive function. Both these interpretations suggest a subversion of

maternal nurturing as a 'natural', essentialised part of being a woman. And to make a final tentative association that may understandably be considered something of an imaginative leap, I suggest there may be a tacit reference to the traditional use of eggs by fine artists to set paint colours. To use egg directly on her naked body may be understood as an allusion to both the privileging of the male as the sole possessor of creative power as well as the centuries old Western tradition of painting the female nude. By making this connection Finley's action may be placed in relation to Carolee Schneemann's painting of her body during the initial stages of her performance work *Interior Scroll* (1975).

As I have already surmised Finley uses her body in order to figuratively capture and expose societal ills, as if to allow these 'ills' possession and expression through her body might facilitate their exorcism. However, her naked body daubed with chocolate to physically and visually express Finley's analogy of the female body as being treated as both a desirable consumable and as faecal waste product, became the dominating and notorious image associated with Finley's work: the "chocolate-smeared woman"[60]. This image of Finley is an example of how her work can have an interpretative association with the pornographic exposure of the female body. Finley conceived this work as a demonstration of the oppression of women in society[61]. However, this work became the centre of controversy regarding the N.E.A.'s funding of what was interpreted by some of the media as brazenly erotic pornography. This accusation results from the difficulty in classifying Finley's work. If Finley was truly pornographic, presumably she would have greater interest in arousing sexual desire in her audience. Although her aims would appear to be closer to the reverse, this image clearly demonstrates how difficult it is for a performer to control the reading of her work and the ever present threat that images of women 'exposed' may be recouped in a fashion that is antithetical to her aims. Finley uses the trope of the exposed female body in an attempt to subvert it's

traditional reading as object of sexual desire for men. That is, as I see it, she wanted to use the naked female body in a way that reversed the usual positioning of women as body to be viewed, with an active body that retained it's sense of agency. Finley plays against the passivity of the exposed female form through her use of confrontational actions and words. However, more important than the actual words she uses ('obscene' or otherwise), it is the way in which she uses language which makes her 'unfeminine' and therefore threatening. Control over language and the symbolic order intended to buttress patriarchal power has been appropriated to undercut it. Finley perhaps seems threatening because the spectator's viewing position is not clearly defined but remains indistinct : as a woman revealing parts of her body, she (conventionally) should be an object of desire for the heterosexual male consumer - the assumed male gaze. But her lewd speech and use of food or abject substances on or around her body subverts this reading. That is, Finley's refusal to conform to the cultural norm of femininity by retaining her dress and a docile demeanour, or to play the role of the entertainer or female stripper with pornographic excess for the punter, is a ground-breaking attempt at subversion. But the representation remains problematic for women as well as men, many, like Jill Dolan, feel that it is impossible to strip the naked female form from it's cultural associations, and that her exposure and use of the abject may in fact reconfirm her positioning as object of sexual use / abuse.[62] This belief does not wish to suppress a woman's freedom to express herself through the body but wishes to emphasis the difficulties that arise from the use of this particular canvas: the subversive elements of Finley's work may be simply re-absorbed into the patriarchal structure as pornographic entertainment. Or, as Jon Erickson aptly put it:

> While transgression is used to undermine the power of hegemonic discourse through the appropriation and attempted devaluation of its images, that appropriation can then be reappropriated ironically into the hegemonic discourse once again.[63]

It is significant to note that Finley's 'body work' has not only presented problems for her audiences in the United States. Finley was banned from performing in London in 1980 because her work contravened a fundamental precept of British law that bans nude women from speaking on stage.[64] In fact Finley's first performance in London did not occur until the 1990s when she performed *A Certain Level Of Denial* at the I.C.A.'s Jezebel season. This law, blatantly reveals a patriarchal authority that requires naked women to quietly submit to their objectification by rendering them mute. Any vocalisation would immediately destroy the illusion of this nude being a thing without language and therefore without a subjective position. It underscores a moral imperative that is not in any way designed to protect women but is implemented by a desire to observe, control and enjoy the female form without allowing her any degree of autonomy; another example of the sado-masochistic economy operating at the expense of women.

After this acknowledgement of the many unresolved difficulties presented by the nude or exposed female on stage, I return to the context of the N.E.A. debates. I would argue that this work was subjected to censure because of the religious Right's desire to control or at least exert their influence on cultural production and the allocation of federal funds to the arts and thus to maintain their vested interest in maintaining the sado-masochistic economy of culture. The accusations of pornography and obscenity was seemingly a confirmation of the media denouncement of her presentations, but were really a reflection of the religious rights interpretative understanding of Finley as an overt representation of unconventional and powerful female sexuality which needed to be placed under control so the operation of sado-masochistic power relations were no more than temporarily disrupted. Helms, as the political representative of the

right wing, used Finley to highlight his own position and gain political leverage, and not to protect the American public from 'obscenity' or pornography masquerading as art.

Yuppiedom

One of the reasons why artists, art galleries and museums are viewed with such deep suspicion and accusations of elitism is that they do not necessarily exist for the purposes of obtaining financial gains. The idea of a non-charitable organisation existing without the direct intention of making a profit, sits uncomfortably alongside what is considered good business practice and the entrepreneurial spirit deemed to be such an important part of American creative life. Performance art is especially culpable and performers like Finley don't even produce video versions of performances for general distribution that could at least be seen as some tangible 'product' of her efforts.[65] This absence of a commodifiable product, this deliberate non-productivity in economic terms is antithetical to the spirit of capitalism and perhaps compounded Finley's 'otherness' in American society.

In Finley's performances during the late 1980s and early 1990s she railed against the young and upwardly mobile (Yuppie), who really became distinguished as an affluent subsection of society during the 1980s economic 'boom' years in the United States. Finley sees the yuppie as a primary target on whom to vent her spleen because of their association with mindless consumerism and designer goods. This consumerism seeks to fill the void of contemporary existence with objects that could be purchased and would bestow status because of their expense, design or style. In Finley's piece *A Certain Level of Denial* yuppies are represented as individuals who express a vacuous

belief that material goods will somehow provide a feeling of integrity and wholeness. Finley appears to see their enterprise as futile posturing, these material things merely emphasising the emptiness of their lives, the hugeness of the hole in their existence. The yuppies compensate for what Finley interprets as their spiritual or moral inadequacy by indulging their insatiable 'desire' for visible signs of their material prosperity.

The evident anger in her piece 'Enter Entrepreneur' (A section of *A Certain Level of Denial*) seems to be fuelled by a sense of betrayal. It is almost as if her expectations of American society have left her wounded. She sees the poverty of the street dweller juxtaposed with the slick, rich white boy broker -

> With your new car, your new teeth, and your solid pastel lime green puke green pale pink apricot shirt that goes together with everything, catching sales as you go, with the Gap as your mascot.[66]

A disturbing reminder of the inequalities experienced by so many Americans. Furthermore, the purchases made and the clean cool colours of this yuppie's fashion statement are a way of buying into societal acceptance. And along with this acceptance comes complicity with hegemonic powers or as Finley puts it,

> You want everyone to look the same, so maybe they'll feel the same and then they'll be easier to control, to take over.[67]

Finley would appear to be referring to the yuppie's apparent desire to remain a homogenous group when on home turf, as if their external similarity in terms of dress and physical appearance may be used to forge an artificial unity. Their collective uniformity acts to reinforce their solidarity as a group and in turn may be used to emphasise and reinforce the difference between 'us' and 'them', that is, the 'other' who fall outside of their designations of what are 'desirable' social,

cultural and political norms. However, in spite of this impulse to separate themselves, the yuppies see a place during their 'time off' for an exploration of the 'wild side'. These 'alternative' experiences are somehow perceived to be more 'real', that is, more elemental, raw or emotional and possibly more physically engaged. Here there appears to be a desire to erase the difference between 'us' and 'them' but only in a temporary way that will not damage the long term prospects and profits of the capitalist mechanism that requires 'difference' to be perpetuated in order to continue its operation. That is, there must always be 'others' that can be drawn upon to feed the ceaseless desire for novelty and new products for purchase. In the text it is evident that Finley sees the yuppie as a parasite attempting to feed upon the 'real' by buying into an experience of art or alternative living.

> After your nine-to-five job, on weekends, looking for the artistic experience. So you can go back to work and show off that you've experienced bohemia.[68]

Finley sees this as a cynical effort to further exploit the 'other' for its commodity value. Finley's text extends this critique to reveal her belief that ethnicity and even poverty are commodified so that the yuppie can sell these things as new 'products' back to the consumer for their own profit.

However, Finley would appear to have her revenge when she responds to this excess by taking all the products and accoutrements of a wealthy consumerist and impels them "up your ass".

> So open up those designer jeans of yours, those Girbauds
> (I even got a pair to).
> Open up your ass and stick up there that sushi, that nouvelle cuisine. I stick up your ass that Cuisinart, that white wine corkage charge, that raquetball, everything made by Braun and Black and Decker. I keep sticking it up there 'cause there's more room. So Mr Yuppie hands me his Walkman and cordless

phone, and I put it up there too.[69]

The anal orifice associated with the disposal of waste matter and buggery becomes, in this instance, the region of male rape. The non-consensual anal penetration of the financially powerful effectively realigns them with the submissive feminine or an emasculated position. Finley, by verbally violating the yuppie's physical integrity questions their apparent invincibility. Finley's words diminish these yuppie men as she reverses sexual domination. For instead of woman being the passive victim of oppressive 'ass fucking', Finley has the capitalists in the submissive pose taking what's given. By forcibly relocating these products of desire into the gaping void Finley sees in these people, this act of revenge reverses the usual scenario and rapes the exploiter. That is, Finley enacts a power reversal that effectively parodies those who feel they have exclusive or privileged possession of social and cultural power and its hierarchies. Moreover, this turnaround refers the spectator back to the thoughtless pillaging of the goods of indigenous peoples and expresses a barely suppressed rage towards those (in particular white, middle-class men) who use power to buy anything, including the minds and bodies of women. The rich white man's burden becomes "the burden of private property."[70] Thus Finley's words again effect a power reversal that undercuts the sado-masochistic economy, temporarily suspending the 'rich white man's' control over social and cultural power in a way that reveals the constructedness and instability of this hierarchy of culture and society that privileges the white, middle class, wealthy male.

'Family Values' and the Religious Right

More recently her work has centred upon challenging and perhaps disrupting established notions of the domestic sphere in a work called *The American Chestnut*. Her anger has been redirected from the injustices of the 1980s yuppie

culture which she saw ignoring the needs of the underprivileged, the homeless and those living with A.I.D.S., to women's powerlessness and reluctance to claim responsibility and power beyond domestic space. In particular she has centred her criticism indirectly on a well-known media personality Martha Stewart, who in June 1996 was voted to be one of the 25 most influential people in America by *Time Magazine*. Stewart, who is well educated, (Bachelor's degree in History and Architectural History from Barnard College) has chosen to remain at home to put her creativity and skill into domestic tasks, producing best-selling books and a TV series *Martha Stewart Living* in the process. But it is her decision to stay at home, which Finley believes has lead to her becoming such a success in America, where neo-conservatism has a widespread hold, and espousing 'family values' makes her a popular figure to promote. In Finley's book *Living It Up: Humorous Adventures in Hyperdomesticity*, such reductive thinking is made into a parody involving a housewife with six arms, each arm necessary to perform numerous domestic tasks and to hold the family together. Her book takes the reader through a month by month account of the year, just like Stewart who produces a monthly schedule of her own movements. However, the satirical and innovative content of Finley's book completely divorces her intentions from Stewart's and made it difficult for her to find a publisher who would be happy to blow apart the cosy image of a blissful, but busy, home life created by women like Stewart.

In fact Stewart was a particularly apt metaphor for Finley's concerns because Finley sees her glorification of the domestic as a "misuse of power"[71], and indeed Stewart's extensive media output makes her an extraordinarily effective political tool for those who interpret the changes in domestic and work patterns as the root cause of many of today's social ills. However, aside from a consideration of how many women prefer to work outside of the home, how

many families, in reality, have sufficient money to enable a potential wage-earner to stay at home all day and "bake cookies"[72]?

Martha Stewart, and others like her, appear to be part of a barely concealed attempt to re- write sexual binarism back into contemporary societal relations. The underlying political agenda would seem to suggest: keep her safely out of the way at home, where she's secure, where she can 'consume', where her ignorance of the world around her reduces her political consciousness and confidence. The discomfort generated by many socio-political factors including gender fluidity and ambiguity has directly resulted in an upsurge in desire for rigidity in gendered role definition: the absence of immutably defined borders seems to have proved to be too unsettling for many.

As I have discussed, Finley has developed a reputation for a repudiation of the American family unit. Her concern stems from the pervasive nostalgia for an idyllic childhood home life that seems to have recently smitten the American public.[73] A nostalgia that ignores the family as the site of the Oedipal scene referred to in my introduction. Finley, in both her writing and the performance of her writing, draws attention to the eruption of this suppression in family relations that are by turns incestuous and/or violent.

Finley's *The Black Sheep* poem, now permanently inscribed on a plaque in a park for homeless people in the East Village of New York, was written as a testament to all those people whose family is nothing like the cosy nuclear structure so often represented as typical of 'normal' middle-class American society. Finley's writing reveals it as a sham and as an excuse to re-impose the strictures of patriarchy on both men and women in ways that effect abuse and violence. In her book *Shock Treatment*, Finley uses short vitriolic monologues to

relentlessly drive home to her readers the failures evinced by society and its dysfunctional self-gratifying family-orientated money-centred individuals. Even in her earlier work like *The Theory of Total Blame* (a production first staged in December 1988 at The Kitchen, New York), the extreme nature of her parody of maternal instincts and the gender determined role as the maintainer / cleaner of the body and home saw her placed within a vividly realised scene of degradation and subservience. However, her action within this framework defied her positioning. For instance, the food she is preparing / wearing remains uncooked and inedible, as Lynda Hart notes:

> Her meatloaf ends up all over her body, bits of raw beef hang from her nose, stick to her hair, litter the floor. Ketchup runs down her arms and legs [...] Irene has no recipes and she refuses to feed her children.[74]

Irene, played by Finley, will not play the menial part prescribed for her. And instead of taking on the burden of responsibility for the inadequacies and shortcomings of her offspring, which is the hallmark of socially constructed motherhood, she rejects them and ejects them - cleans her house of these dependent bodies.

Representing Children

The media were quick to express their disquiet over the representation of a partially clad child in the work of Mapplethorpe.[75] This depiction when exhibited was immediately construed as pornographic and exploitative by neo-conservatives in their attempt to extend negative artistic associations and discredit federal spending choices. In an election year, such actions have been read as a strategic political device to garner interest when other electoral issues

no longer arouse a sense of immediacy as Tom Matthews quotes Ed Rollins, a strategist.

> Crime and drugs have been big for the last two years, but they haven't gotten more intense. So anything that shows up that can't be defended rationally can become an issue.[76]

However, the controversy this picture aroused drew attention to some of the problems inherent in the presentation of this type of material. Again, because of the impossibility of controlling the reading of an image, what may be read as a picture of innocence and the bodily freedom of early childhood, may also be understood to be the body of desire for paedophiles. It was apparently in this climate of concern that the picture was removed from the exhibition in a number of locations. Finley, however, focuses attention on the abuse of children from a very different standpoint. In her performance text 'Refrigerator', (from *The Constant State of Desire)* Finley presents her monologue like an autobiographical recollection of her father that has her being placed into a refrigerator naked with other foodstuffs to be prepared, un/dressed and eaten. 'Daddy' is playing his secret game. Laughing and smiling he takes vegetables from the refrigerator bin and starts:

> Showing me 'what it's like to be a mama,' he says. Showing me 'what it's like to be a woman, to be loved. That's a Daddy's job,' he tells me.[77]

The damaged child goes to bed, protecting herself with band-aids between her legs, only to have her mother yell at her for "playing with your food again, girl? I was going to make your father's favourite."[78] Finley goes on remorselessly, never revealing whether the little girl is herself or some fabricated child. Whether this representation is or is not based on fact becomes lost as a web of fractured moments of memory, traumatic experience and/or imagination intertwine and become indistinguishable as they make up the uncomfortable fabric of her

performance. As spectators witness, Finley appears to subsume her particularised identity in order to become a locus for the projected subjectivity of others, drawing upon what C.Carr calls "the cultural ether".[79] Finley becomes a conduit through which 'others' may speak. Finley draws upon and presents a side of many people's family life that is disquieting and rarely spoken of in contexts other than the therapist's room. As I see it, Finley's work strikes at the hidden parts of family dysfunction that the new Right wing, keen to glorify the traditional role of the patriarchally constructed family in contemporary society, would rather not admit exists, let alone see presented in art. In this way the sanctity of the family is shattered or at least the myth of family as a place of unquestionable security is revealed as a sham. The new Rights determination to reinstate family life as a central facet of a healthy society expresses no tolerance towards those that highlight the imperfections intrinsic to this form of socio-economic structure or towards those who pursue or recreate alternative formations, like those actualised by gay partnerships or single parent families. There is an underlying anxiety that the autonomy established by such 'families' will threaten and undermine male, heterosexual power and authority. By expressing a reality of family dysfunction that the new Right would deem abhorrent, Finley added another weight to the balance of factors against her continued support by the N.E.A. who were experiencing so much pressure from the political forces of the new Right.

Yeah, But Is It Art?

How images may be (mis)interpreted or misrepresented, is an area explored in Finley's performance text 'It's Only Art', a part of *A Certain Level of Denial.* This is an almost parable like narrative that takes the sort of possible comments made by lobbyists against some forms of contemporary art and extrapolates

them to extremes. At the same time Finley mercilessly parodies Jessie Helms and his colleagues. The piece starts by announcing that all art had been removed from the walls of a museum, leaving only the frames and the reason for the artwork's removal. Finley then goes on to reveal that the:

> Toilets were locked up in museums because people might think someone peeing is art [...] Someone might think that the act of peeing is a work of art. And the government pays for that pee flushing down that toilet.[80]

In making these statements Finley suggests that now the individual is denied any powers of interpretative autonomy by a government who displays an intensely patronising attitude towards the viewing public. Art has effectively been made into something dangerous and subversive that the public must be protected from. Ideas, after all, may be contagious. The references to 'piss', quite possibly inflect back to the debate surrounding the Serrano picture or to a small section of work by fellow defundee John Fleck.[81] Beneath this ridiculous extreme Finley senses fear, a fear based upon a denial of the body. That the body may reveal itself as subject to the ebb and flow of digestive and excretory fluids and substances. Substances Finley reveals as virtually invisible or 'obscene' according to dominant cultural norms.

> It's a good life when no-one thinks that you ever piss or shit.[82]

Finley stages her own extrapolated version of the censorship of art in an attempt to underscore a repressed preoccupation with bodily matters, which returns us to the idea that notions of indecency and obscenity remain determined by the cultural prescription of the viewer as illustrated below.

> All ceramicists were banned because working with clay was too much like playing with your own shit.
> All glassblowing became extinct because it was too much

like giving a blow job.[83]

Finley draws a dystopic picture of a world policed for the moral security of the populace. This vision is fascistic in nature. Truth becomes relative while propaganda becomes the creative tool of the state.

> The assignment for the army writers was to make the stealth bomber as important as the microwave oven, Musicians were asked to write a tune, how the HUD scandal was no big deal, like taking sugar packets from a cafe.[84]

But the greyness of this new artistically muted world eventually breaks its own carefully policed boundaries when Helms finds himself entertaining some European guests whom he wishes to impress. Helms finds there is nothing that is permissible for him to show them, nothing to demonstrate the uniqueness of American cultural expression. So politicians and their equally art-critical friends are invited to produce art on the White House lawn.[85] An invitation that had them all quaking, until, following the screamed instructions of a child, they began to frenetically produce all manner of cathartic images, newly released from the repressed recesses of their psyches, that soon result in their arrest and imprisonment. Finley imagines a particularly grim destiny for Helms,

> For he was painting his soul out, which was HATE AND ENVY AND CRIME AND DARKNESS AND PAIN. They threw him into the slammer. He was tried for treason and lost. And on his day of execution his last words were: "It was only art." [86]

This would appear to be Finley enacting her form of 'revenge'.

> A lot of people feel the same way I do, but they *keep it in* because it's socially unacceptable to mourn in public or to show feelings. If you did, you'd be vulnerable or abandoned - maybe no one would love you. But I have the ability to reveal my feelings - so in a sense, I'm getting even. Revenge can be art.[87]

And yet aside from her personal distaste for Jesse Helms, her point is clear, the suppression of artistic expression is one of the classic actions of repressive government. The most notorious manifestation of this type was witnessed in the actions of the Nazis during the Second World War. On the 19th July 1937 the Entartete Kunst Ausstellung (Degenerate Art Exhibition) was opened in Munich following an extensive campaign to remove 16,000 artworks from German galleries. This exhibition was the presentation of works of art that the Nazi's had singled out as standing outside the ideological framework stipulated in cultural policies that had been in the process of reassessment since 1936. These policies were concerned with what constituted 'good' art. Ironically, the exhibition mounted by the Munich museum, Haus der Deutschen Kunst which had been constructed for the purpose of exhibiting Nazi state-approved works, found their first annual show eclipsed by the 'degenerate' exhibition which attracted over three million visitors during it's time in Munich and other city centres and as such became the most successful exhibition ever mounted by a German museum.

Finley references similar actions of extreme intolerance to slash at the heart of the American psyche by aligning the apathy expressed in the face of social malaise, with the atrocities committed in the name of Nazism in her piece 'We Are The Oven', another part of her performance *We Keep Our Victims Ready.* Her words are issued like a warning. Stressing the similarities she sees between these apparently divergent experiences.

> Many people think that junkies and people with AIDS deserve to die. Women who are dependent on the state should be sterilized because they are unproductive citizens, say the zealots. In principle we are not very different. We keep our victims ready. What is our form of 1938 Nazism? Who are our zealots with evil ways? Our Christian holymen preach as if all homosexuals will burn in hell. Our politicians allow the homeless to rot on the pavement. Many believe that HIV carriers should be branded like those in concentration camps. Many believe that by giving IV drug users clean needles we are giving them the

> wrong message. WE KILL BY NOT DOING ANYTHING AND ALLOW DEATH FOR NO APPARENT REASON.[88]

Finley goes on to relate how the issues raised by the N.E.A. debates with regard to the attempts made by the new Right to silence disparate voices, parallel the narrow-mindedness characteristic of fascism, that ultimately resulted in the Holocaust.

> Our religious fanatics who try to destroy and distort the artist,
> the gay, the lesbian voice - Wildmon, Robertson and Helms.
> Now they can't kill the commie
> So they are out to kill the soul of America - me and you
> ITSJUST THAT OUR OVENS ARE AT A SLOWER SPEED.
> ITS JUST THAT OUR OVENS ARE AT A SLOWER SPEED.
> We keep our victims ready.
> These religious fanatics want only a voice that is their voice
> Not a voice of diversity, a voice of difference, a voice of choice
> A voice of strength for togetherness. [89]

Finley was not alone in drawing parallels between the actions of the new Right and the Holocaust. The performance artist Rachel Rosenthal refused to accept the $11,259 Solo Performer Fellowship she was awarded in 1991 because of the way her experiences of the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany echoed what she felt was occurring in contemporary America via the N.E.A.

> I grew up in Paris in the '30s and, although I was a child,
> I remember how complacent we were then about the rise of Nazism.
> In Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, as everywhere, the first sign of a fascist takeover is the repression of free artistic and intellectual expression. I am very frightened with what is happening in this country with the attacks on citizens by politicians, and with the apathy and complacency of the American people who do not see this clear and present danger in our midst.[90]

Rosenthal clearly felt that to accept this money was to tacitly accept to be gagged and silenced, and would concur with authorities that placed certain artists in the category of degenerates, just as the Nazi's did in the 1930s.

However, while Finley's words may act as a caution, it would be inaccurate to state that the absence of N.E.A. funding for an artistic project comprises a suppression of speech as there is no constitutional right to government funding. Additionally there is nothing to suggest that an artist cannot create with their own or private funding. However, for some, practising art without the support of the N.E.A. becomes the equivalent of suppression of speech because there is no financially viable means open to them to create and subsist. In these circumstances the N.E.A. effectively becomes the evolutionary device determining who are the 'morally' fittest to survive.

Conclusion

When a society reaches a certain level of maturity it is capable of extending its patronage to artists whose agenda may be transgressive and challenging. It is a reflection of that society's self-assurance and sense of security that it can sustain levels of criticism and unpredictability from its art makers. Consequently, the realisation that such controversy should surround the issue of federal funding for the arts and the role of art within society is an indication of the extent of internal confusion and ambiguity with regard to America's current status as a union of states made up of a diverse and discordant voices. Finley epitomised this schizophrenia by representing something of the disharmonious multitude. By raising an opaque mirror to the fragmented face of America she reflected back the hideous, the acrimonious, the vicious and brutally comedic, at a time when there was a desire, particularly from the new Right, to have clear cut images. To have bold defining lines redrawn to differentiate 'others' from us: Man from woman, homosexual from heterosexual, the diseased from the healthy. Furthermore, beyond the assertion of this desire to order and name according to a rigid taxonomy, there remains an even deeper fear that is not so

much to do with the uncertainty created by the many splinters of social, economic and racial identity, as it is to do with the slippages and seepages that would seem to defy borders or boundaries of any kind. Finley's visceral, body-centred and socially pained performances are deliberately hard to stomach - gritty, unpalatable. Clothed, partially clad or naked, this woman subverted assumptions regarding appropriate stage behaviour and 'desirable' female subjectivity. She verbally and visually manipulated food, disparate bodies and abject substances thus challenging the audience's perceptual understanding of how ideological inscription informs people's relations to these things. Finley reveals the everyday dynamic's of sado-masochistic power relations, calling attention to the relentless aching, searing agonies and perditious grief that pervades 1990s America with it's numerous abuses, oppressions and A.I.D.S. related deaths. It was for these reasons and not for any purported 'obscenity' or indecency in Finley's performances that had her singled out with 'others' who resisted certain hegemonic ideologies and notions of subjectivity and placed her as a central player in the N.E.A. controversy.[91]

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[8] 'Conversation : William Ivey', 25th June, 1998. http://www.pbs.org/newhour/bb/entertainment/jan-june89/ivey_6-25.htm
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[12] 'The budget deficit [...] soared in the 1980s to unthinkable levels. During that time the Government cut income tax rates, greatly increased defence spending, and did not cut domestic spending enough to make up the difference. Also, the recession of the early 1980s sharply reduced revenues, therefore raising the deficit and forcing the government to spend much more on servicing the national debt at a time when interest rates were high. As a result, the national debt quintupled in size after 1980, from $709 billion in 1980 to $3.6 trillion in 1990.' From 'The History of the U.S. Budget Deficit', by Justin Ginsburgh, http:/www.enteract.com/~jgins/budget.htm
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[24] Mary Caputi, Voluptuous Bodies Yearnings: a feminist theory of the obscene, 1993, p4
[25] Peggy Phelan, 'Serrano, Mapplethorpe, the NEA and You', in *The Drama Review,* Vol. 34, No 4, (T128), 1990, p14.
[26] The Associated Press, 4th May 2000, 'Reform Party presidential candidate Pat Buchanan ruled out picking a homosexual or gay rights advocate as a running mate or Cabinet officer, saying that such sexual orientation is 'a disorder'. Buchanan said, "If someone is an out-of-the-closet homosexual and if someone advocates the homosexual rights agenda publicly they're not going to be in my Cabinet. I believe that homosexuality is a disorder. It's a wrong orientation". [However,] Buchanan has said he doesn't "believe in persecuting anybody"...'
[27] Pat Buchanan, 'Where a Wall is Needed', Washington Times, November 22nd, 1989, in *The Culture Wars,* ed. Richard Bolton,1992, p138
[28] Jane Gallop, 'Beyond the Phallus', in *Thinking Through the Body*, pp119-133
Pat Buchanan, 'Where a Wall is Needed', Washington Times, November 22nd, 1989, in *The Culture Wars,* ed. Richard Bolton,1992, p138
[29] Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter*, 1994, pp135-142.
[30] Lynda Hart, 'Motherhood According to Karen Finley: The Theory of Total Blame', *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage,* ed. Carol Martin, 1996, pp108-119.
[31] Interview with Andrea Juno in *Angry Women*, 1991, p 41.
[32] Ibid., p44.

[33] See Lynda Hart's discussion in *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, 1994, pp89-103.
[34] The censured performances of these four artists were formally described as 'Finley's controversial show, "We Keep Our Victims Ready", contains three segments. In the second segment, Finley visually recounts a sexual assault by stripping to the waist and smearing chocolate on her breasts and by using profanity to describe the assault. Holly Hughes' monologue "World Without End" is a somewhat graphic recollection of the artist's realization of her lesbianism and reminiscence of her mother's sexuality. John Fleck, in his stage performance "Blessed Are All the Little Fishes", confronts alcoholism and Catholicism. During the course of the performance, Fleck appears dressed as a mermaid, urinates on the stage and creates an altar out of a toilet bowl by putting a photograph of Jesus Christ on the lid. Tim Miller derives his performance "Some Golden States" from childhood experiences, from his life as a homosexual, and from the constant threat of AIDS. Miller uses vegetables in his performances to represent sexual symbols."
'National Endowment for the Arts et al. V. Finley et al. No.97-371 Supreme Court of the United States: Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit March 31, 1998, Argued June 25, 1998, Decided - Notes: Concurring Opinion, Justice Scalia.'
http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doc28.html
[35] Carole Vance, 'Misunderstanding Obscenity' in *Art in America,* May 1990, p51.
[36] Karen de Witt, 'Not All Smiles at the Endowment', in *The New York Times*, 13th October 1990, p13.
[37] Carole Vance, 'Misunderstanding Obscenity' in *Art in America,* May 1990, p49.
[38] Phillip Pearlstein, 'An Artist's Case', in *Art in America*, Jan 1990, p33.
[39] Carole Vance, 'Misunderstanding Obscenity' in *Art in America,* Vol.78, May 1990, p51.
[40] Ibid., p49
[41] 'Finley v. National Endowment For the Arts'
http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doc7.html
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Douglas Davis, 'Arts and Contradiction: Helms, Censorship and the Serpent', in *Art in America* , May 1990, p57
[45] 'National Endowment for the Arts et al. V. Finley et al. No.97-371 Supreme Court of the United States: Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit March 31, 1998, Argued June 25, 1998, Decided.'
http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doc28.html
[46] 'Conversation : William Ivey', 25th June, 1998
http://www.pbs.org/newhour/bb/entertainment/jan-june98/ivey_6-25.htm
[47] p36.
[48] Andrea Juno, 'Karen Finley' in *Angry Women*, 1991, p43.
[49] C.Carr, ' "Telling the Awfullest Truth": An Interview with Karen Finley' in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Lynda Hart,1993 p156.
[50]Finley, *Shock Treatment,*1990, p119.
[51] Ibid., p51
[52] Trans. N.J. Dawood (2nd revised), *The Koran*, 1966, " It is an indisposition. Keep aloof from women during their menstrual periods and do not touch them until they are clean again. Then have intercourse with them as Allah enjoined you.", p347
[53] Finley, *Shock Treatment,*1990, p119.
[54] Ibid., p120.

[55] Kenneth Clark, The Nude: A Study in Ideal Art,1976, p6.
[56] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* selected and trans. by Annette Lavers,1993, p85.
[57] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Art*,1976, p79 [my italics in quote]
[58] Ibid., p344.
[59] Lynda Hart, Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression, 1994, p94.
[60] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, 'The NEA's Suicide Charge' in *The Washington Post*,11th May 1990, A : 27.
[61] Andrea Juno, 'Karen Finley' in *Angry Women*, 1991, pp 42-43.
[62] Jill Dolan, 'The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance', in *Theatre Journal,* No.39, May 1987, pp156-174.
[63] Jon Erickson, 'Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary Performance: The Wooster Group, Holly Hughes and Karen Finley', in *Theatre Journal*, Vol.42, No.2, May 1990, p235.
[64] Karen Finley quoted by Christopher Busa, 'Talking with Finley', in *Provincetown Arts Magazine*, Vol.12, 1996 Annual Issue, http://www.capecodaccess.com/Gallery/Arts/talkingKaren.html
[65] Although Finley doesn't distribute videos of her work, she has written quite extensively about her art in a number of books though these books tend to have very small print runs. The irony of this restriction is that the books quickly become very rare and thus commodifiable at an even higher rate of exchange.
[66] Finley, *Shock Treatment*, p6.
[67] Ibid., p6.
[68] Ibid., p8.
[69] Ibid., p8.
[70] Ibid., p9.
[71] Karen Finley quoted by Christopher Busa, 'Talking with Finley', in *Provincetown Arts Magazine*, Vol.12, 1996 Annual Issue. http://www.capecodaccess.com/Gallery/arts/talkingKaren.html
[72] Ibid.
[73] Deborah Chambers, 'The Golden Age of the Modern Family? In *Representing the Family,* (London: Sage, 2001), pp60-91.
[74] Lynda Hart, 'Motherhood According to Karen Finley: The Theory of Total Blame', in *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage,* ed. Carol Martin, 1996, p144.
[75] For example Andrew Ferguson's article 'Mad About Mapplethorpe' in the *National Review* , 4th August 1990, "...as well as photos of 'children in erotic poses,' a form of personal expression more commonly known, when not federally funded, as child pornography." http://www.powerup.com.au/~dominion/ff/b24.htm
[76] Tom Matthews, 'Fine Art of Foul?', in *Newsweek,* 2nd July 1990 p38.
[77] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment,* 1990, p20
[78] Ibid., p21.
[79] C.Carr, *On Edge: Performance Art at the End of the Twentieth Century,* 1993, p128
[80] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment,*1990, p69.
[81] See endnote 31.
[82] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment*, 1990, p69.
[83] Ibid., p70
[84] Ibid., p70
[85] Karen Finley names many involved in the NEA debates George Bush (fired N.E.A. chairman) John Frohnmayer, William Buckley, Donald Wildmon (of the A.F.A.) and Dana Rohrabacher (outspoken against the N.E.A.4) and Tipper Gore.

[86] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment,* p74
[87] Karen Finley,'Karen Finley' in *Angry Women,* eds.Vale and Juno, 1991, p41.
[88] Karen Finley, *Shock Treatment,* pp123-124.
[89] Ibid., p124
[90] Rachel Rosenthal, 'Rosenthal's Statement Concerning the NEA Grant' in *The Drama Review,* Vol.35, 1991, no.1, [T129] p13.

RON ATHEY, A.I.D.S. AND THE POLITICS OF PAIN

> Pain and restraint provide us not with an *overtly* political subversion but with the aesthetic subversion of the subject itself- prior to political possibilities, and thus all the more capable of subverting them. It is because the personal *is* the political - and, more to the postmodern point, because we can and must only resist power at the same microlevels at which it manifests itself - that the aesthetically shattered, postsubjective, ascetic, erotic, sadomasochistic body becomes politically subversive.[1]

> But what seems to be particularly threatening about AIDS is that it is linked to the breakdown of boundaries. The virus threatens to cross over that border between Other and Self: the threat it poses is not only one of disease but one of dissolution, the contamination of categories.[2]

In this chapter I wish to expand my argument by examining the political terrain of masochistic performance in relation to a male performer who is both gay and H.I.V. positive. I do this to provide an additional inflection that I believe diversifies my argument regarding the political efficacy of this type of performance work. In order to do this I will consider Reik's essential features of masochism as discussed in my introductory chapter which emphasises the importance of fantasy and ritual, the need to show one's humiliation, degradation and pain *to* others, the necessity of suspense, and the use of provocation to ensure one's wishes were carried out. However, while Reik was examining masochism in terms of a psychopathology, where those diagnosed were understood as essentially lacking any sense of agency, I will explore how the same and / or similar masochistic characteristics may be re-interpreted through the performance work of Ron Athey as an enactment of the possibilities of alternative cultural power formations. I will argue that these formations in effect resist the socially prescribed limits that demarcate the realm of pleasure from that of pain. Performances such as those of Ron Athey, in deliberately blurring the boundaries understood to exist between 'pleasure' and 'pain', are often viewed with scepticism by the media in part because Western society is generally orientated towards using technology, science and industry to provide

increasingly complex ways of cushioning the body from experiences of discomfort or disease and their association with disorder.[3] I wish to suggest that Athey, in blurring binary distinctions in relation to pain and pleasure, allows other traditional binaries also to be placed under scrutiny. In particular Athey's work underscores and parodies binary notions of masculinity and femininity.

Athey's performances may in addition be considered to focus spectators attention on how our acculturation in the West determines and prescribes the 'limits' of representation, that is, what is "unrepresentable" in Jean-François Lyotard's sense of the word:

> That which denies itself the solace of good form, the consensus of taste [...] that which searches for new presentations.[4]

Athey's work, through the presentation of the 'unrepresentable' effects a socio-political agency of excess. This excess refers to that which is passed beyond or falls outside of categories in a way that draws attention to the limits of representation or the edge of the limit. In excess, Athey effectively performs in a territory that is, by definition, largely unmapped, but through his public occupation of this zone, he opens it up for definition and interpretation, so that the boundary shifts and the limit to be transgressed is relocated once more. In skirting around and through the limits of representation, that I have discussed in relation to Karen Finley's work and the 'obscene' body, I wish to extend and suggest that Athey's work offers a number of provocative means of resisting traditional representations of masculinity, pain, and pleasure as well as people living with A.I.D.S. or H.I.V. infection.

Ron Athey became a victim of the controversy surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts (N.E.A.) after a performance at the Walker Centre in

1994. In this performance Darryl Carlton takes part in a scene called the Human Printing Press. Small incisions were made in a pattern on Carlton's back, and Athey used surgical paper to make prints from the cuts. The prints were clipped to a washing-line pulley rigged above the audience so that they would pass above the heads of some members of the audience. It was erroneously reported in the press that blood dripped from these prints splattering the audience and that spectators were franticly trying to leave the premises. When it was discovered that the N.E.A. had contributed money to the piece, outrage was expressed from many quarters, as the media focused in upon the story. Thus I would argue that Athey's H.I.V. positive status was a critical factor in the attempts to condemn and suppress the performance of his work. The combination of cutting and bleeding and Athey's H.I.V. positive body was interpreted in the media as a threat to audiences whose ignorance of how H.I.V. is transmitted became all too apparent in the aftermath. Although there was never at any time a risk of infection for the audience the 'bad' press for this performance ensured the withdrawal of support from funding bodies like the N.E.A., who felt pressurised by the reaction. The withdrawal of funding and the negative media coverage, spawned by fear of H.I.V. infection, effectively ensured that Athey was unable to perform his work in publicly funded venues in the United States. However, there were several other factors that contributed to this latent censorship: his open homosexuality, his display of the naked male body, but more particularly his use of religious iconography in unconventional and irreverent ways, and his use of masochism and the abject body in performance. I will argue that masochism is central to his performance work and also the chief motivating force behind the widespread desire to suppress his disturbing vision. I am suggesting that masochism appears threatening because Athey uses it to question the place, function and meaning of religion through his appropriation of Christian symbolism. His masochistic practises may be used to

consider how it is possible to blur the sorts of boundaries that we understand to determine our individual subjectivities. That is, he uses masochism, with its potential to 'shatter' or fragment our sense of a cohesive and fixed identity, to raise questions about both the nature and location of the self and the relation of that self to society. By calling the very basis of identity: the self, into question, masochism may be used to enact the mutability of individual identity in a society increasingly faced with doubts and uncertainties concerning the relevance / permanence of its structuring mechanisms. These acculturated mechanisms of power, according to Judith Butler, and detailed in my introduction, effectively structure our understanding of the gendered body, and by extension, I am arguing, support the social hierarchies that maintain ideals of 'desirable' gendered subjectivity. I would argue, using a Foucauldian understanding of the operation of power, that this power depends on the maintenance of clear boundaries between categories. There are certain dominant dualistic ideas still in operation in Western society, which place concepts such as masculinity in opposition to femininity, heterosexuality opposed to homosexuality, sickness to health, 'good' over 'evil', and pain versus pleasure. As I have intimated, in such a society, a conflation of pleasure and pain such as that enacted through masochistic performance must necessarily be perceived as 'perverse' because it contravenes fixed notions of what is acceptable, that is, socially defined and supported 'aims'. What I am suggesting is that if the basis of one fundamental binary opposition is made questionable, then other generally accepted binaries may also be undermined. In resisting or transgressing the limits of pain, pleasure and masculinity, these actions reveal the relative placement and mobility of physical and representational limits as well as their impact upon the construction of subjectivity.

This chapter will demonstrate how Ron Athey's performance works, using masochism as a key element, achieve a poignant critique of the structuring mechanisms of patriarchal power and patriarchy's influence on notions of fixed subjectivity, particularly 'desirable' masculine subjectivity discussed in my introduction. I will highlight how these structures of power have been used to suppress and shape the representation of A.I.D.S. in art and performance. As I have already suggested, the forces of culturally determined positivity mean that the masochist, guilty of allowing or carrying out unnecessary acts of intentional self-harm, without culturally recoupable results, is likely to become marginalised as pathological. That is, if his or her actions do not appear to have some culturally justifiable or approved aesthetic purpose, for example, to win a race, or to 'improve' the condition / appearance of the body in line with Western ideals, he or she is understood as 'sick'. This is not merely because of a masochist's penchant for purposefully interfering with their corporeal and psychological integrity and thus disrupting the aforementioned boundaries, but because of the masochist's claim to enjoy, gain peace through or even revel in the experience. Indeed this idea of the apparent contradictions of masochism is one that Nick Mansfield's *Masochism: The Art of Power* is particularly concemed with. As I pointed out in my introduction, Mansfield noted that a number of previous theories of masochism only expressed its dynamics in terms of the polarities of pain and pleasure.[5] Mansfield instead suggests that there can not be such a rigid separation between these apparently opposed sensations. He surmises that there is no clear division between these experiences and that a large proportion of our physical perception of pain and pleasure is dependent on how these bodily sensations have been culturally inscribed.

In addition there is a connection to be made between the still dominant tendency to make polarised distinctions between sensations of pain and pleasure and

attempts to blur these 'binaries' through the marking of particular parts of the body through inscription, piercing or cutting. As I will subsequently argue, this break through the skin may be used both as a source of group or social identity and / or may serve as a locus of sensual intensity that may supersede that presented by sexual relations that privilege the penetrative behaviour of a heterosexual couple and traditionally place the 'instinctual' needs of the male over the 'sensual' desire of the female.

According to Alphonso Lingis who researched the inscribed body in non-Western societies and recorded his observations in his 'Savages' chapter of *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, such modifications may also be used to increase the surface area of erogenous zones, thus increasing sensual pleasure, through an initially painful experience.

> The savage inscription is a working over the skin, all surface effects. This cutting in orifices and raising tumescences does not contrive new receptor organs for a depth body [...] it extends an erotogenic surface [...] it's a multiplication of mouths, of lips, labia, anuses, these sweating and bleeding perforations and puncturings.[6]

In addition self-inflicted body wounds may be used in some societies as metaphors. Rifts and disagreements within a community may be remedied through a symbolic incision made in the body of a member. The successfully healed wound heralds a return to harmony. In addition there are numerous anthropological examples of societies that use scarification to signify rebirth of an individual, particularly when undergoing rites of passage.[7] Although Lingis's attention in *Excesses* was centred on relatively small non-Western, non-technological societies, his study seemed to provide confirmation to individuals like Fakir Musafar that there is a deep-seated desire in many people to undergo ritual processes that include masochistic elements.

Fakir Musafar known as the father of the Modem Primitive movement believes this pain may result in an altered state of consciousness; releasing what he calls "spiritual energy" thus enabling an individual to appreciate their body in an alternative way that exceeds that of their accustomed everyday relationship with it.[8] However, the "spiritual energy" to which he refers is just as likely to be a result of the powerful endorphins that pump through the body in response to extreme sensations culminating in a 'natural high'. The term 'Modern Primitive' is one that Fakir Musafar himself coined in 1979 to refer to himself and other like-minded individuals who are concerned with "some sort of strange juxtaposition of high technology and 'low' tribalism, animism, and body modification - a kind of 'Technoshamanism,' if you will, at once possession trance and kinetic dance."[9] As far as Musafar is concerned, the relative intensity of this pain marks the depth of this 'spiritual event' and at the same time provides a means whereby the body memorises the incident. The visible changes to the body act as prompts for this memory, so that the skin becomes a readable inscription of experience. However, it should perhaps be noted that pain, when it is experienced, arguably presents as real and intense an experience of the body as it is possible to have, but these sensations do not necessarily 'mark' the body in any readily accessible, visual manner. I would argue that the visible mark or scar on the body may be used as one sort of mnemonic device for recalling past events played upon the body, but that the body itself stores or 'memorises' events and habituated ways of functioning and reacting that require no visual cue. That is, the memory of the flesh is a result of our accumulated socio-physical experience of the world, and that potentially these memories may be triggered by any number of internal or external factors.[10] It is also important to question Fakir Musafar's non-western cultural appropriation of 'primitive' ritual as a badge of authenticity, as well as the tendency to romanticise the 'noble savage' as somehow embodying the

'spiritual' and the 'natural' in a way that is understood to be lacking in the spiritually 'tired', secularised and automated West.

Performance and Permeability

> A body that is permeable, that transmits in a circuit, that opens itself up rather than seals itself off that is prepared to respond as well as to initiate [...] would involve a quite radical rethinking of male sexual morphology [...] in the rethinking of sexual encounters and sexual pleasure demanded by the AIDS crisis, with its possibilities of a nonphallicized male sexual pleasure.[11]

I will demonstrate, through an analysis of the performance work of Athey, with its fluidity and constantly changing dynamics of dominance and submission, masculinity and femininity, pleasure and pain, how the former binary in these pairings is privileged over the latter. Furthermore I will demonstrate how this privileging remains and still forms the bedrock of contemporary society and subjectivity. In Athey's work this hierarchy is exposed in sharp relief, and through this process of exposure is rendered questionable. A system of binaries is inherent in patriarchy and is, in part, responsible for maintaining the current capitalist economy of post-industrial society. A system that relies on the consistent functionality (i.e. good health) of the majority of the population. While Athey's work doesn't intentionally target patriarchal power, by which I mean Athey's reasons for making the work were not consciously a political statement directed against power disparities, I would argue that his work does present a subversion of this type of structuring system. This subversion works through his exposure and parody of socio-cultural constructions of masculinity and the constrictions these constructions impose. Whether he is conscious of this or not, I would like to suggest that Athey's work questions whether the penis, with its attendant economy of sexuality / pleasure, is necessary for a 'complete' experience of the body. Through his concentration on, and manipulation of the

penis, particularly in his work *Deliverance* in which he is symbolically castrated with a staple gun in one scene and in another uses an enormous double-headed dildo with a fellow performer to mock the obsession with penetration, and the mystique that supposedly surrounds the penis, Athey makes parodic reference to the machinations and assumptions of phallic power. Although Lacan would argue that the penis is not necessarily correlative to the phallus, that is, that the possessor of a penis or the male, is not automatically the person in possession of 'power' or the phallus, I would agree with Jane Gallop in her chapter 'Beyond the Phallus' in *Thinking Through the Body* where she asserts that there remains a tacit association between penis and phallus that conflates the conceptual with the physical, so that the male is more often popularly conceived of as possessing and asserting power than the female.

The Movement Away from Phallocentricity

In the wake of the countless A.I.D.S. related deaths during the 1980s, a growing number of people in the gay and heterosexual community in Los Angeles were looking to express themselves and their sexuality in ways that heightened their awareness of the body as perhaps a sexual encounter might, but that did not necessarily expose them to the new H.I.V. risks now associated with the reception and exchange of bodily fluids that may occur in penetrative sex.[12] This expression often took the form of tattoos, piercings, cuttings and brandings. These actions allowed individuals to focus attention upon, or favour certain parts of the body in preference to others, and perhaps reflected a desire to experiment with alternative ways of experiencing the body that did not rely on a phallic economy. That is, a wish to move away from, or at least reconsider, the receptive qualities traditionally associated with acts of sexual consummation; away from the image of the male body as impermeable. For in the act of cutting,

piercing or tattooing, the presumed integrity of the male body, not usually associated with seepage and leakage, enters a temporary or even a 'permanent' (genital piercing) liminal zone which may arguably be aligned with the feminine and its associations with the flowing of various body fluids. In this way, these practices represent a rupture in the accepted understanding of the male's bodily integrity. Furthermore, the relationship of intimacy and trust that must be kindled in order for such activities to take place may be an important factor in bonding individuals or members of sub-cultural groups.

These actions have many motivations, some may be understood as a reclamation of the body after life changing events, for instance nipple piercing carried out after a child has been weaned or a piercing or tattoo following a rape attack[13]. Alternatively, the process may result in a sort of sensual awakening of parts of the body previously not associated with any degree of heightened sensation. Moreover, they may be understood as a means of gaining greater self-confidence having consciously chosen to submit the body to an activity that required their endurance of pain. The apparently masochistic nature of these practices and their increasingly prominent incidence and coverage in the media during a time of sexual uncertainty and technological change may be interpreted as a 'return to the body'. That is, in contemporary society, our individual sense of agency may be diminished because of the increased way in which the body is given over to pervasive mechanisms of control. For instance the medical screening of the body and its substances may be used to establish an internal and external profile determining our 'fitness' / health and encouraging us to assess ourselves via pre-set parameters for such things as weight, cholesterol, alcohol content, salt intake, and cigarette smoking.[14] Scientific research into the human genome may allow for the genetic selection and exclusion of certain traits, diseases and disabilities. Political control may be exerted through the

limitation of access to resources and funding determined by such factors as the ability to deal effectively with bureaucracy. Whereas information technology may be used to compile and exchange an individual's personal information in a way that inherently has few controls to ensure the maintenance of confidentiality. Indeed, rapid technological change may create an underclass of those reluctant or unable to access and use information and scientific technology. In addition there are concerns relating to the pressure of social and self control exerted to police the boundaries of the body from contamination or 'pollution' (particularly in relation to body fluids). Indeed, Dr. Armando Favazza notes that self-mutilative behaviours often arise in societies facing "destabilizing conditions":

> Diseases; angry gods, spirits, and ancestors; failure of boys and girls to accept adult responsibilities when they mature; conflicts of all sorts, for example, male-female, intergenerational, interclass, inter-tribal; loosening of clear social role distinctions; loss of group identity and distinctiveness; immoral or sinful behaviors; ecological disasters. Self-mutilative rituals [...] serve to prevent the onset of these conditions and to correct or 'cure' them should they occur. The rituals work by promoting healing, spirituality, and social order.[15]

It could be argued that Favazza's observations seem to support the parallels that can be drawn between the disruption caused by A.I.D.S. related illnesses, the increased ambiguity surrounding gendered identity and social roles, and the desire to use masochistic practises in a ritual process enacted to effect a social 'healing'. That is, the disruption of the social body may be 'cured' through the use of the physical body in acts of reclamation. In this context the modified body, deliberately altered in accordance with the specific wishes of the individual, becomes the surface over which we may gain a sense of our own agency and self-determination. In addition there may be a person's desire to outwardly demonstrate ownership of their own body, that is, assert their own sense of agency, that the body belongs to no God, no state or family with its patriarchal

trappings, but belongs to the person in question and they may explore and use its terrain in any manner they choose, freely marking, cutting and bleeding. I am arguing that body-marking may be used to create bonds of unity and difference that may be the first or primary step towards giving participants their own sense of personal empowerment especially in circumstances where groups of individuals have found their personal, financial, class or cultural status has meant exclusion from many aspects of mainstream culture and society. When these events occur in a performance context, they may gain a political efficacy that may give participants and witnesses an increased or secondary sense of empowerment, which I will subsequently expand on when discussing witnessing. However, it is for precisely these reasons that the use of body marking as a source of self-expression potentially causes disruption. Favazza points out the widely held belief that 'non-conformist' or sub-cultural groups may use skin markings to:

> Demonstrate their defiance of traditional authority, to display a stereotyped symbol of physical strength and aggression, and to provide a sense of identity and solidarity with other group members.[16]

Actions like these, that deliberately ruptured the body's surface, particularly those that caused blood to seep, became especially provocative in the context of widespread fear and uncertainty surrounding the many manifestations of A.I.D.S. related illnesses in the 1980s. Members of the gay community who were proponents of various groups experimenting with body modifications became increasingly unified in adversity when confronted with the overwhelming prejudice A.I.D.S. brought with it. They were not about to relinquish these bodily and spiritual explorations. One reason for this defiance may have been that for many these activities had become a significant part of their explorations into gay identity. Moreover, the relative sexual freedom and openness that resulted from

various revolutionary changes of the 1960s and 1970s discussed in my chapter on Marina Abramović was not something the gay community wished to see threatened by the rising incidence of A.I.D.S. or the tactics of the religious right-wing, particularly the right-wing in the United States who had begun to figure significantly in anti-homosexual rhetoric. In fact there are a plethora of right-wing religious organisations and Republican politicians that have grown in political and cultural force over the past two decades in the United States.[17] They tend to take a pro-(patriarchally constructed) family, pro-life, anti-gay stance, many quoting Leviticus 18:22 or the other half dozen biblical references to homosexuality as 'evidence' of God's condemnation of same-sex intercourse. The implication being that the A.I.D.S. crisis was a form of divine vengeance for the 'abomination' of homosexuality and a signal to reinforce the importance of the nuclear family in contemporary life. In this way the A.I.D.S. crisis was utilised by the Christian right-wing and Republican politicians like Dan Quayle and Pat Buchanan as an opportunity to reinforce and proliferate their own essentially conservative ideas, in particular representing gay men as inherently deviant, 'sick' and contaminating. By contrast, members of the gay community, some of whom had derived a sense of their own agency through their adoption of masochistic and or marking practises, were beginning to use art and theatre to explore and create alternative forms and images of A.I.D.S. and gay men.

The Representation of A.I.D.S.

I will now consider the power-countering dynamics of Athey's work in relation to the context of A.I.D.S. representation and performance. Before Athey, the representation of A.I.D.S. on stage in the United States was assisted by the extraordinary rallying power of organisations like ACT UP, which Mark Harrington in *Acting on AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Politics* surmises, became like a

religious crusade centring on this one cause. Harrington speaks of those who died as martyrs and saints, and continues the religious analogy by talking about "preaching" as an important part of the organisation's "mission". [18] Such organisations and their use of art and performance played a crucial part in drawing attention to the social and political ramifications of this health crisis, disseminating their 'message' and initiating action despite the general apathy of government bodies and the media, who initially failed to report many of the early A.I.D.S. performances between 1981-1984.[19]

One of the primary focuses of A.I.D.S. representation in the arts during the 1980s was, naturally enough, an attempt to prevent the disappearance in mind and memory of those who had suffered and died. That is, many of the works created during this time were primarily concerned with preventing those afflicted from simply 'vanishing'. A desire to create some tangible evidence of their existence and to bring to the attention of the public their lives as gay and straight people at a time when H.I.V. positive people had been rendered largely invisible in the political sphere, often because of their H.I.V. status, sexual orientation or race. Subsequently works that developed the audience's understanding of A.I.D.S. played an important role in increasing public awareness of the crisis and in raising funds to support those effected by the virus. Several so called 'A.I.D.S. plays' in fact were catapulted into the mainstream and enjoyed widespread popular success in the United States, Britain and abroad.[20] Such popular success however, probably contributed to the public perception of A.I.D.S. as a white, gay man's disease as it was white, gay, men who were primarily represented on stage and were responsible for the staging of these works, as well as making up a large component of the audience who attended. These productions, which were widely reported in the media, thus focused upon a relatively small section of the gay community. This observation is not intended to

undermine the fact that these theatre performances were a crucial part of the process of representing A.I.D.S. to the wider public and in so doing initiating political change through increased empathy and awareness.

The popularity of these 'A.I.D.S. plays' may in part have been due to the fact that they did not confront the viewer with the 'ugliness' of illness. That is, in an attempt to work against connotations that conflate gay sexuality with sexual perversity (in its popular negative sense) and sickness, considerable effort was made only to present 'positive' images of gay men. Illness, in this light, was carefully staged in order to make the 'reality' of A.I.D.S. visible but without reinforcing the idea that homosexuality itself was a sickness.[21] By contrast, Ron Athey presents an uncensored version of what he understands to be the 'reality' of sickness, perhaps haunted by the horror of his own physical fragility in the face of this virus. Athey uses performance to collectively raise and appease his personal demons but in a way that confronts the audience with his 'real' HIV positive body. That is, while many theatrical works dealt with the *representation* of people living with A.I.D.S., Athey *presents* people living with A.I.D.S. to an audience who are aware of his H.I.V. positive status. In the so-called 'A.I.D.S. plays' and Athey's performances, performers play a role; however with the knowledge of Athey's status the resonance and implications of Athey's work differ from that of a conventional theatrical production. That is, we as an audience are aware that his latent illness won't wash away in the way the 'actor's' make-up will. This fact subtly alters our relationship with the performance, creating a sort of intimacy born out of his risky self-exposure. And, as will become apparent in my subsequent analysis of his work, Athey is not concerned with sparing the audience any of the details, but wishes the audience to embrace the experience fully and to soak up every hideous detail. That is, I am arguing that the immediacy of Athey's performance work works in opposition

to any sense of complacency that has arguably come to surround the current notion of A.I.D.S. as a dangerous but containable disease.[22] Nor will he allow his audience to be lulled by the panacea that has been offered by science and social forces. His insistence on reopening the wound of A.I.D.S. and revealing its devastation repetitively, gives ample political reason to those who wish to ensure that his work is not supported.

Athey's connection to the activities of a sub-cultural underground arose as a result of his go-go dancing at Club Fuck, a nightclub which opened in 1990. Athey became involved in live piercing and demonstrations at this club. These activities soon extended into a performance. It was his montaging of short tableaux developed at Club Fuck that culminated in his 1992 piece *Martyrs and Saints*. This piece is specifically about A.I.D.S. and the first tableau is called 'Nurses Penance'. It begins in a hospital setting suffused with uncomfortably bright light. There are a number of 'sick' performers on stage. Some are on gurneys, some in wheelchairs, all are in states of physical abjection having been cut from black body bags. Here, Athey and his co-performers enact the pain and humiliation of the exposed and abject body by using grotesquely caricatured and brutal nurses to carry out publicly, physically degrading and intrusive examinations. It would seem that the nurses attend to patients in this abrupt manner because it is only by maintaining a psychological distance from events that they are able to mentally survive the horror. That is, the nurses suffer too or do 'penance' through their necessary dealings with the sick. What is not clear is what 'sin' has been committed to make penance necessary. However, what is clear is that Athey intended to use this performance to highlight the plight of sufferers. Perhaps this work may be considered a personal act of witnessing. That is, the piece works as an acknowledgement of all the friends and colleagues he and his co-performers have lost to A.I.D.S., and of the associated

respect the piece is both a tribute to lost friends and a mechanism to assist in the process of their collective grieving. The performers themselves speak of how evocative this enactment was for them, inasmuch as it recalled similar situations and circumstances that their now dead friends were faced with:

> Sitting in there is really really intense for me. One, it brings back Hook, it brings back McGavel, it brings back Al, it brings back Louie - you know it just brings back all these people that died.[23]

But presenting the abject nature of A.I.D.S. related illnesses on stage is not an unproblematic choice to make in the larger picture of A.I.D.S. representation. The focus in *Martyrs and Saints* and *Deliverance* is almost entirely on the horrifying physical manifestations of disease and suffering and the mental anguish that results. The company of performers often act as Athey's auxiliaries. By which I mean, their identities as singular and specific beings experiencing difficult circumstances themselves seems overshadowed by the always compelling presence of Athey. While we do indeed gain what amounts to an autobiographical insight into Athey's story, there is always the danger of seeing performers who deal with their H.I.V. positive status or are living with A.I.D.S., as always already dying and that real or potential illness is the only reality of their lives. That is, that A.I.D.S. representation is only about lives already assumed to be extinguished rather than about people who are dealing with particular circumstances of real or potential illness and death and leading largely ordinary lives. Athey, in this performance piece, acknowledges illness and suffering in a clinical setting ('Nurses Penance'), this effectively constitutes one reality. But his second scene 'Saint Sebastian' moves beyond the hideous but mundane 'reality' of the hospital to present us with a melodrama of suffering reformulated through the appropriated imagery of a Christian saint. Myra Rifkin whose androgenous body propped on a crutch is lanced with arrow-like protuberances and spinal needles, adopts a pose that is deliberately reminiscent of St. Sebastian. Rifkin is

a relatively small, precariously naked woman who waits defenceless and close to losing consciousness, while the audience seats themselves. Saint Sebastian is understood within Christianity to have been martyred for his beliefs, that is, his suffering is given meaning because it represents his resistance to relinquishing his faith - the Christian faith. St. Sebastian is also the saint prayed to in times of plague supposedly because the marks made by the numerous arrows are analogous to the pock marks made by disease. In adopting this image of martyrdom, Athey may wish to draw parallels between the outsider status of St. Sebastian who allowed himself to be pierced to death by arrows rather than give up his god, and the masochistic performer (outsider) Rifkin's acceptance of the 'arrows' that pierce her body because she will not relinquish her homosexual identity. By associating these images with the previous scene, there is a tacit implication that those who resist hegemonic constructions of gender like Myer Rifkin, and more particularly gay H.I.V. positive people, are like martyred saints existing in a largely secular society and that their illness / difference marks and separates them and perhaps even gives them an iconic status in a sub-cultural context. In addition the ambiguity that surrounds her androgynous form echoes the sorts of gender indeterminacy that has persistently surrounded religious images of this saint and many depictions of Christ.[24]

By contrast, Athey enters cross-dressed as a large tightly corseted woman in a white dress, who speaks of Athey's pre-destined vocation to enter the ministry. His appearance in drag both subverts his talk of his religious destination (women traditionally having been excluded from this role), but also perhaps underscores the presumed emasculation of men who devote themselves to God to the exclusion of 'earthy pleasures'. Athey, as the large domineering woman, plays the ritual nurturer and healer of mortal wounds in drag that seems to

simultaneously emphasise his maleness (the dress highlighting his musculature) while undermining or rather parodying his masculinity (he moves with feminine grace and surety in a way that demonstrates the constructed and performative nature of gender). Athey leads Rifkin to a bath, removes the 'arrows' from Rifkin's body, wiping her blood and anointing oil on her face and body in gestures of healing which work in contrast to the abrupt ministrations of the nurses in the previous scene. So, Athey moves from presenting grisly 'truths' about sickness to representing the 'deviant' body as a suffering icon in a way that is perhaps designed to evoke in the spectator the often strangely emotive beauty of religious depictions of pain. By adopting these religious references the piece moves some distance away from the problematic associations I mentioned in relation to the A.I.D.S. body, but that may be equally applied to any body that 'deviates' whether through gender or illness. Rifkin endures with patience and forbearance a series of piercings. Piercings that have been carried out according to her own will. Athey presented Rifkin as someone with a heightened status and dignity, like a martyr waiting to die who is elevated rather than diminished by the situation, and as such she becomes subject to our almost reverent contemplation. It is by drawing parallels between 'outsiders' like Rifkin (and by extension a representation of other excluded people like those living with A.I.D.S.) and martyrs that Athey subverts conventional readings of the 'deviant' body as abject and contemptible or the A.I.D.S. body as already dead or awaiting a potentially ugly, ignoble death. In the final scene 'The Crown of Thorns', Athey himself, making deliberate reference to Christ's Crown of Thorns, has surgical needles implanted through his scalp, evoking images and comparisons with the most famous martyr in Western society. This is not a quiet resigned act of acceptance but, like his actions carried out through Rifkin, this is a glorification of his own situation, a resistance enacted through the borrowed iconography of Christ.

Public Reception and the Media

However, it was not just Athey's borrowings from Christian iconography that proved to be problematic for some members of the American public. A combination of the general public's lack of understanding of how the H.I.V. virus may be transmitted, racism and the misrepresentation in the media of Athey's work, proved to be important factors in demonstrating how sensitive and volatile an issue A.I.D.S. was at this time. According to David Román, it was because at least one member of the performance troupe was known to be H.I.V. positive (i.e. Athey), that the viral status of *all* the performers became suspect in the minds of the audience. Furthermore, when the blood of Afro-American Darryl Carlton was used for making prints in *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life*, Mary Abbé, a disgruntled former employee of the Walker Centre, wrote that this blood was 'dangerous' H.I.V. positive blood. It would seem that, although there was no evidence to suggest Carlton was H.I.V. positive, perhaps his colour together with the mythology that the H.I.V. virus had it's genesis in Africa somehow combined to create an unconscious justification for the statement Abbé made in her article published by the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* that said that Carlton really was H.I.V. positive.[25] The uproar caused by this performance and the press response that followed was, as I noted in the initial stages of this chapter, extremely damaging for Athey and the N.E.A. who contributed $150 to the piece. Apart from the gross inaccuracies of the story, the flurry of similar articles also published confirmed the general publics' ignorance of how H.I.V. is transmitted and as Román points out, revealed racist undertones, that is, that 'black' blood is already inscribed as contaminated. It is this sort of prejudice, based on lack of knowledge, that remains at the root of much 'othering', both in terms of the Afro-American community in general and of those who have a H.I.V. positive status.[26]

By contrast in Britain, H.I.V. blood was not the primary issue when Athey brought his production *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* to London's Institute of Contemporary Art (I.C.A.) in 1994. In an unusual step for the I.C.A. (widely reputed as an almost sacred bastion of free expression in art and performance unfettered by internal censure regardless of the content), lawyers were brought in to assess the work. In particular the curators were concerned about scenes involving the piercing of individuals. This anxiety was a direct result of the Spanner case (The Queen vs. A. Brown) in the 1990s and the way in which the ruling over this case effectively compromised an individual's rights over their own body.[27] That is, a sentence of up to five years could be imposed for any person who intentionally injures another person, regardless of whether the act is consensual:

> One person deliberately inflicting any physical injury on another person, even with that person's desire and consent, was [is] committing a criminal assault.[28]

However, there is a lack of clarity in the law residing in the range of exceptions to this ruling, which include such generally condoned activities as dentistry and ear piercing, but does not cover the actions of some religious and performance practices. Ultimately the performance did take place but in a significantly modified state. In the 'Crown of Thorns' a "pre-pierced body double" (Alex Binnie, a tattoo artist) was used instead of the live piercing of Athey[29]. This substitution didn't contravene Spanner because Binnie, as a *licensed* tattooist, was able to carry out the piercing himself before the performance. In addition the cheeks of the 'brides' at the 'Wedding Ceremony' were ritually marked rather than pierced on stage and the 'Human Printing Press' scene was viewed on video.[30] The I.C.A., in an unprecedented action, ultimately chose to censor Athey rather than risk the possibly irreparable financial damage that may have

resulted from an uncensored showing. The curators believed this was the only viable alternative available to them that would not risk the closure of the I.C.A. This censorship reflected the particularities of British socio-political anxiety at this time.

It is also significant that the misinformation surrounding this performance continues to be disseminated even in publications like the esteemed RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance : Live Art since the 1960s* (1998) where she inaccurately records that "Ron Athey in one performance carved letters into the back of a fellow performer who was HIV positive."[31] This is consequential because it shows that the rumours that surrounded the controversy over this performance have come to predominate over the facts revealing how fear and ignorance of H.I.V. infection and transmission remain dominant.

Making a Mark

Athey describes his work as being about "right now", that is, about his immediate reality.[32]. However there would seem to be little doubt that as a man carrying a potentially fatal virus he would like to leave his 'mark' behind, both literally and metaphorically. Because of this desire for some tangible, permanent reminder of his own life and in an attempt to give his own life meaning, Athey became much more interested in both the ritual aspects of what he was doing and with presenting an event that could be witnessed live, in the flesh, by members of an audience. I will argue that for such an individual, accustomed to exploring his sexuality through the enactment of dominant-submissive fantasies with others, performing for an audience may have provided a means of extending the ritualisation of his experiences, ordeals and visions in a way that gave him a masochistic sense of empowerment. In the process of creating such

performances Athey wished to create and leave an imprint, seeking recognition and confirmation as something more than:

> [...] some stupid fag who died of AIDS?[...a] damaged boy
> who was never a minister, who rebelled and lashed out,
> a self serving queen driven to promiscuous sex who contracted
> a disease and died?[33]

That is, Athey sought both recognition for his work and recognition from observers who witnessed his physical and psychical pain in order to achieve confirmation of his own existence and the significance of that existence beyond the designations of identity as either sick or queer. Indeed, for Athey, the message has always been of tantamount importance.

> I am programmed to carry a message. The message
> is the programme, to be a vehicle. It's the most important
> thing in my life - it's like more important than my life [...] It's more
> important than me being happy. It's more important than me
> being comfortable. It's more important than me being healthy.[34]

His rhetoric on this matter still echoes the zealotism of his Pentecostal upbringing, an intensity that belies his proclaimed atheism. Brought up to believe that he was ordained by God to become the new Christ, it is difficult not to see echoes of his sense of the significance of these early prophecies for his future revealed and expressed by his totemic status in performance. Athey is using performance to achieve a different kind of 'divine' prestige but one that proclaims a parallel message and that still retains him as essential and prominent protagonist. According to Jeff Spurrier, writer and next door neighbour of Athey, this message is "a big FUCK YOU", which he further elucidates as:

> A statement of defiance on behalf of all who feel marginalized:
> the black, the gay, the female, the tattooed, the pierced, the
> branded, the fist-fucking, the poor - all the wayward children
> who refused to be good and listen to Aunt Vena Mae and Jesse Helms.[35]

Athey, like Finley, positions himself as the conduit through which the disenfranchised may make their presence felt. Through the increased visibility of Athey's work and the controversy that has created further publicity, the potential political efficacy of his actions is promoted as his message of provocation reaches out beyond the 'converted' confines of the marginalised groups themselves and into the middle-class mainstream.

> The martyrs of early Christianity attached strikingly great importance to the fact that their suffering *ad majorem Christi glorium* was seen. These witnesses to the faith desired to have witnesses of their martyrdom. They loved to show their wounds and their disgrace. They wanted all the world to know about their passionate zeal.[36]

Athey, as I mentioned, directly draws on the images and atmosphere of Christian iconography in the process of making his works, particularly depictions of crucifixions or martyrdom, imbuing them with contemporary meanings. These meanings, as I have already discussed, are usually concerned with the representation of the HIV positive body. The 'positive' body as a sort of post-modern secularised saint. The images of sainthood and martyrdom seem to have become a palimpsest for new cultural inscriptions concerning gay and A.I.D.S. representation. I would argue that Athey is unable or reluctant to shake off the sort of collective and shamanic experiences of his early Pentecostal upbringing, both as an especially revered child marked out for a unique role and as an adult reconstructing and re-enacting some facets of these images through his own body and those of his collaborators. Is his reinvestment in the 'sacred' and his use of religious iconography an act of collusion with the Christian idea of revering a specially chosen individual who has some 'divine' purpose? I would argue that Athey does empathise with the subjects of religious images and their often barely suppressed sensual quality, because he shares their sense of being a maligned outsider. But he aligns himself with outsiders like Jesus Christ or St. Sebastian, who have come to be revered in countless works of religious art that

have survived the centuries so that he doesn't so much collude as reverse the power of the cultural forces that have shaped his early existence. That is, for instance, in casting himself in the role of the abused martyr he takes on for a brief transitory moment the sort of outsider status accorded to the former outcast Jesus Christ when he was raised upon the cross. That is, Athey in his own way follows the Christian credo to emulate the life of Christ and share in his suffering. But it is also this self -imposed alignment with the sacred son of Christianity that may incense and raises questions regarding the limits of artistic expression, blasphemy and the dis-investment in phallocentricity implied by the figure of Christ.

> Insofar as such an identification implies the complete and utter negation of all phallic values, Christian masochism has radically emasculating implications and is in its purest forms intrinsically incompatible with the pretensions of masculinity.[37]

That is, it is implied that the ideal follower of Christ adopts Christ's submissive model of behaviour, deferring to and accepting the greater wisdom of God regardless of the consequences. The Christian, in this way, could arguably be seen as religiously destined for masochism. However, this docility works in contrast to the driving, potentially sadistic force of phallocentricity, creating a conflict of interests. And if H.I.V. positive people, particularly gay male H.I.V. positive people, adopt Christian iconography as a symbol of their disenfranchisement and, furthermore, re-invest it with apparently masochistic overtones how does this appropriation inflect back upon the cultural currency and values of Christianity? It is this overwriting of Christian imagery in a palimpsest effect that alters the resonance and potential interpretative readings of such imagery and the ideology behind it that appears to be one of the chief concerns of Christian critics of any art or performance that utilises Christian iconography. In Athey's re-presentation or re-cycling / remaking of sacred

imagery there has been construed an attack or a threat to the Christian religion itself as I discussed in relation to *Piss Christ* by Andres Serrano in Chapter 3. The crucified figure of Christ, the central emblem of Christianity, has been the object of two millennia of contemplation. A representation that reminds the individual Christian of their own 're-birth' and redemption resulting from the spilt blood of a tortured body. Jon Erickson writes:

> To make something that belongs to others your own, you must transgress, that is trespass, across those boundaries separating what is yours from what is theirs. I make it mine, so the effectiveness that your meaning gives to it is devalued. This doubleness is at the core of both parody and travesty: the ridicule of authority[38]

Athey's work may be understood as a site of struggle for the possession of this symbolism, a transgression that Erickson suggests undermines the authority and power of the original bearer of meaning. However, although Athey's work may present a new inflection upon the traditional iconography of Christianity, it seems unlikely that contemporary use and challenges poses any serious long term threat to the faithful, which seemed to be the preoccupation of Donald Wildmon of the A.F.A.[39] Instead, I would like to suggest that Athey's appropriation, while it may on the one hand be construed as a "ridicule of authority" that undercuts the exclusive reading of saints as being important to and belonging to Christians' alone, I don't believe Athey's borrowings necessarily "devalue" or reduce the "effectiveness" of this imagery. But rather he complicates and increases the surfaces over which these images may be read, adding layers and permutations of meaning that may be regarded as testifying to the continued power and resonance of the original images taken from their Christian settings. I would like now to consider Athey's *Deliverance* in this light.

In *Deliverance* (a title that arguably could be considered to be religiously referential), we, as witnesses to Athey's testimony, may see our own vulnerabilities and uncertainties reflected through the performers suffering.

However, in contrast to the use of the Crucifixion in a Christian context, where sacrifice serves as an intermediary or bond between god and 'mankind', there is not the consolation and prize of eternal life to appease and bind spectators after witnessing the performers' suffering. So what purpose does this 'sacrifice' serve? According to the Bible, Christ's sacrifice and death sees his body returned to earth, entombed behind a rock that is later found to have fallen away. He appears alive three days later on the road to Emmaus (according to Luke 24:13) or in front of Mary Magdala (according to John 20:14, Mark 16:9, Matthew 28:9). His rebirth signifies that his sacrifice was beneficial rather than pointless because his resurrection and assumption into heaven sets a precedent for those willing to follow a Christian god. Symbolically, Christ represents the bond between God and man that allows for the redemption and rebirth of all followers of Christ. It also importantly confirms that Christ was willing to carry out this task for the greater good of people as well as to effect a direct communication with/as God. In contemporary times, the blood (wine) and flesh (bread) of Christ, his symbolic remains, are shared in the ceremony of transubstantiation and communion. In this way a piece of the sacrifice is consumed and a share in the promise of resurrection enacted through the body of communicants. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss wrote in *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*;

> It is the victim or its remains which will pass on to the sacrificer the new qualities it has acquired by the action of sacrifice. This communication can be effected by a mere blessing [...] But the most perfect way of effecting communication was to hand over to the sacrifier a portion of the victim, which he consumed.[40]

If we are to apply this type of dynamic to the performance work of Athey, we as the audience become the communicants who feed with our eyes upon the sacrificed body of Athey. His 'death', like Christ's, is inevitable. His 'resurrection' occurs through our participation as witnesses to his actions and as bearers of

the collective memory of all that has taken place. In the context of contemporary North American politics, Athey's adoption of this sacrificial trope may be read as a parody of some of the religious right wings' concern with sacrificing 'gayness' on the altar of A.I.D.S. That is, the belief that A.I.D.S. represents a retributive act by God on 'sodomites' and that the 'gay body' must be sacrificed as an act of purgation for society as a whole. Moreover, the way in which Athey has chosen to stage the 'gay body' replacing the body of Christ as martyr, I suggest underscores the injustice and lack of mercy shown to both Christ and to those persecuted as H.I.V. positive or as homosexual. Done in this way Athey effectively questions the ethos of Christianity as a faith of compassion and tolerance.

Following the same lines as the Christian story, Athey remains always the willing participant providing little resistance to the numerous physical intrusions, for if that which is to be sacrificed is genuinely reluctant it becomes a less worthy offering.[41] Thereby the violence and the passive response to it, become both justified and imperative. And yet resistance remains on at least one level, even in the person of Christ who reputedly uttered a few words of reproach before bleeding to death.[42] For resistance acts as an indication or confirmation of subjectivity and is arguably at the root of the fluctuating dynamics of masochism, for without any sort of resistance, you already manifest the qualities of an object. As an unresponsive object, it is not possible to provide the necessary acknowledgement of another's subjectivity that is part of the role of the human sacrifice and the masochist in sado-masochism. But in terms of Athey's performance in *Deliverance*, his whole desire to undergo and repeat these actions indicates a resistance to accepting any sort of socially sanctioned control over the exhibition of physical boundaries. Athey's 'sacrifice' may also be a reflection of his own resistance to any sense that he lacks agency in the face of

his potential illness. A resistance manifest as controlled and testing violence against the body, which I will argue has some correspondence with Reik's masochistic idea of 'suspense' as an attempt to delay or prolong tension.

Suspension

According to Reik, the concept of suspense in masochism represents a means whereby anxiety may be controlled. I am arguing that this attempt to control is a demonstration of individual agency and challenges the Freudian understanding of this aspect of masochism that believed that individuals actively desired to experience discomfort for the sake of discomfort. The idea of the masochist actively seeking discomfort encouraged the pathologising of masochism as a 'condition' because of the way in which the organisms active desire for 'unpleasure' worked in complete opposition to the Freudian notion of the Pleasure Principle that I have spoken of in my introduction.

> In the psychology which is founded on psycho-analysis
> we have become accustomed to taking as our starting-point
> the unconscious mental processes [...] The governing purpose
> obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognize [...] These
> processes strive towards gaining pleasure, psychical activity draws
> back from any event which might arouse unpleasure.[43]

This argument, that the organism will always attempt to achieve a sort of stasis thereby avoiding excessive stimulation and seeking to decrease tension, although revised in Freud's later work 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' to acknowledge the dual nature of sexual tension, (that is, certain amounts and forms of tension may be pleasurable as well as un-pleasurable), his argument still seems to circulate back to the basic precepts of the Pleasure Principle;

> The fact that sexual excitement possesses the character
> of tension raise a problem the solution of which is no less difficult

> than it would be important in helping us to understand the sexual processes [...] I must insist that a feeling of tension necessarily involves unpleasure [...] if, however, the tension of sexual excitement is counted as an unpleasurable feeling, we are at once brought up against the fact that it is also undoubtably felt as pleasurable.[44]

So Freud introduced the notion of the Reality Principle, with its concerns with the preservation of the entire organism, as a tempering force upon the Pleasure Principle. However, Leo Bersani in *The Freudian Body*, draws attention to the way in which masochistic desire may be considered an overthrowing of the Reality Principle in favour of the Pleasure Principle. Thereby the Pleasure Principle remains dominant, in spite of the Reality Principle, even to the point where the organism and/or the ego are endangered or 'suspended'. The masochist exerts control by enforcing these conditions and in doing so demonstrates his or her ability to act with agency as he or she seeks out the limits of their own subjectivity. I am suggesting that masochistic actions, like Athey's and his fellow performers are also about reaching for and experiencing personal limits, so while there are certain agreed 'ground rules', a sense of fulfilment is only achieved by pushing right up against and indeed beyond those boundaries. For example, Myer Rifkin speaks in *Hallelujah: A Story of Deliverance* about how many bells she will have hooked to her body and Athey's encouragement to increase their number and thereby extend her limits.[45]

Furthermore, the masochist actively seeks to control and experience the painful situation so that he/ she may be alleviated from anxiety created by suspense so that what is actually experienced as pleasurable is not the pain itself, but the anticipation of pain *and their own control over the circumstances of that pain*. In this way the masochist uses suspense to extend their personal power over their own body. As I wrote in my introduction, Reik calls this "a flight toward the future".[46]. I would like to suggest that this aspect of masochism may therefore be particularly important if we consider it in relation to Athey's HIV positive status.

Most of us try to avoid anticipated pain but it has been observed by Armando Favazza that there is also a tendency to attempt to reduce our anxiety regarding future pain we know we will experience by submitting ourselves to small controlled doses of pain, for example, by cutting a finger in anticipation of a major operation. These actions require our own active participation but remain under our control. It could be possible that by putting his body through ordeals of humiliation, degradation and endurance Athey may be able, in small part, to allay his fears and control his anxiety over any AIDS related illness his body may succumb to. Psychiatrists like Favazza also believe that these types of actions, that is, acts of apparent self-mutilation, may provide a valuable means of recalling the self back to the body, a way of dissipating tension in a cathartic manner that prevents greater acts of self-harm. However, by including Favazza's interpretation of self-cutting I do not wish to suggest that Athey's actions are pathological. What I hope to suggest is that in carrying out masochistic ordeals in performance, he may be going some way towards providing himself with some sort of psychological protection and adaptation to the notion of his future suffering and death.

Audience - Contract - Agency

Athey's trilogy *Martyrs and Saints, Four Scenes from a Harsh Life* and *Deliverance*, which I will subsequently describe, are not just self-imposed ordeals for the performers, they are a trial of endurance for all, testing the audience's tenacity as well as the performers. For although these pieces may well be difficult to perform, they also required a great deal from the audience.

> It wasn't done for shock value, it was actually done to desensitise at the start so you would look at the rest of the piece in a different way - if you lasted through it.[47]

In *Martyrs and Saints* first scene Athey's fantastical vision floods us with the violence of extreme illness. The abhorrent vision of bodies out of control has rendered the nurses speechless - lips sewn shut - as they witness the unspeakable. Can we sit down and watch while these seemingly over-sized, over-made-up nurses brusquely administer to naked patients who vomit and shit in a mercilessly red, over-lit environment playing fierce industrial-style music? We are deliberately over-stimulated by the horror of it all. Shocked into a state of disbelief. Leo Bersani, as I have noted, who wrote that "sexuality is indissociable from masochism" might have interpreted these actions as attempts at psychic "shattering".[48] That is, the conditions of restraint and pain enable the subject to be 'split', by which I mean there is, opened up, a play between secured subjectivity and it's loss or fragmentation so that the very structures of selfhood are put into question through these oscillations. When applied to the circumstances of Athey's performances, it could be surmised that, in the face of so much painful stimuli, the ego finds itself unable to assimilate all that bombards it causing a temporary state of fragmentation. In this instance this sense of disruption might be said to expand out to the audience too. However, as viewers, although we may well have a phenomenal response, that is, a physiological reaction to the piece, our experience is inherently different from the experience of the performers. That is, if a 'shattering' occurs for the spectator, there is a qualitative difference between viewing and responding to the masochistic act and feeling the 'pain' within your own flesh and responding.

Furthermore, the whole positioning of spectators as passive viewers of events emphasises the audience's complicity and, it could be argued, places the viewer in the position of a sadist. I will discuss this dynamic in relation to the contract and the notion of witnessing. Athey's stated aim, outlined in the last quote, is to make the audience ready to view the rest of the piece, as if this 'initiation by fire'

is his way of eliminating the faint-hearted or those who lack commitment to his enterprise. By choosing to remain beyond this point in the performance, I would argue, the spectator establishes a sort of additional tacit contract with Athey beyond that of the usual performance contract, that ties the spectator in more securely, more personally and compounds the sense that these are truly masochistic events being witnessed and that the spectator is an important component of the fantasy presented. This becomes important in a consideration of the political efficacy of the performance in opening up the possibilities of re-thinking society and socially prescribed norms as I subsequently discuss.

As I have already asserted, there is a mutual understanding between the audience and performers to conform to various controls and limits. However, the performance contract can take a more literal form. For instance, as Kathy O'Dell points out in relation to a Ron Athey performance enacted in 1994, it was thought necessary for every potential audience member to sign a disclaimer before entering the performance space.[49] This written document was designed to relieve the administrators of Performance Space 122 (P.S.122) in New York of the legal responsibility for physical 'safety' during the performance, specifically in relation to blood and blood products. This was done in direct response to the protests raised and accusations made when Athey used blood from Darryl Carlton's back to make prints at the Walker Arts Centre earlier in the year, as previously discussed. In the usual performance situation an audience member can expect that all the necessary precautions have been taken to ensure spectators are able to attend performances without physical risk. This amounts to a non-literal contract between the host venue and any actual or potential spectators. And indeed in this case the reality of the situation proved there was no greater risk to the individual than at any other performance at this venue or any other. However, Athey's widely publicised HIV status placed

pressure on administrative bodies to instigate a literal contract between the performance space and anyone who wished to attend Athey's work within it. This effectively put into writing what was previously assumed to be an agreement or contract. This action functioned to suggest that the perceived risks proliferated by the media had a truth attached to them as tangible as these literal contracts, thus giving this masochistic performance a heightened political and radical dimension that it might not otherwise have had. David Román, who attended this performance, said that he was particularly unsettled by this requirement because of what it tacitly said about people's understanding of H.I.V. risk and that by agreeing to sign he had made himself complicit with a system that perpetuates this inaccurate notion.[50] Reluctantly he was forced to comply, in the sense that he *had* to sign if he wanted to see Athey's show and support this performer. This literal contract and the publicity that surrounded the performance thus increased the perception of this performance as masochistically radical. This may have increased it's potential to be politically efficacious, but at the same time it clearly demonstrated the deficient politics that surrounded general awareness of H.I.V. and A.I.D.S.

The Contract and the Witness.

By choosing to stage the intensely personal, as Athey does in every one of the pieces that make up what has come to be known as a trilogy (*Martyrs and Saints, Four Scenes in a Harsh Life, Deliverance*), it is clear that Athey wants witnesses, that is, an audience to share this visceral, exposed and haunting experience.

> Why the fucking bloodbath? The shit? The vomit? All performed on a well-lit stage so that, hopefully, no details will be missed. To take a stab at it, using these bodily functions, assisted by the voice, words and sound, I'm testifying. I'm wanting people to endure these real

> experiences, and grasp the ideas behind them. I'm sure it's because I'm damaged, but I want it to be heard[51]

Until the idea of God was rendered questionable in the Western world during the nineteenth century, God was widely considered the most important witness.[52] However for Athey, a performance audience serves this purpose, observing his tortured body, recognising him, confirming his subjectivity despite the cruel ministrations that sometimes appear to reduce his body to the level of object. This 'bearing witness' is central to Athey's work and again could be said to sustain a direct relation between his discarded faith and his masochistic performance investigations. His work is there to continually emphasise that it is not a video, it is happening now and it involves real bodies. As I have previously suggested, this *presented* 'reality' works in contrast to the 'reality' *represented* by the actor. This is the crucial difference between the masochistic performer working with 'real' pain and the actor who may play the part of someone in pain. We, as spectators, may view the actor, but the actions of the masochistic performer are 'witnessed', and our reception of the performance on stage means that we are then able to give testimony. That is, a tacit contractual agreement is made. Witnesses by implication become liable, by which I mean bound by the 'law' of the masochistic contract. This idea of being bound to give testimony is also important when considered in the light of other performers and performance groups that advocate a 'witnessing' of events. Tim Etchells of the Sheffield-based performance group Forced Entertainment describes one of the aims of the group is to produce witnesses rather than spectators because:

> To witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them.[53]

This position suggests a desire to both encourage the audience "to be here and be now" as well as to engage with what is happening or has happened with a

view to examining its larger socio-political relevance, " thinking, talking and reporting" or giving testimony as a responsibility and response to the performance.[54] Peggy Phelan, reflecting on Etchells' formulation, points out that this may suggest that "ethical action might not be completely dependent upon empirical truths".[55] The performance works of Forced Entertainment deliberately incorporates and works with elements of 'fact' and 'fiction' thus highlighting for the audience the constructedness of any 'truth'. Phelan suggests that we, cast in the role of witnesses, may be equally provoked to "ethical action" by the fictional injustices or "traumas" as we might be by watching 'real' events and that a number of other performance groups, dance and theatre practitioners are concerned with exploring "a new political ethics" and dealing with "ethical responsibilities"[56]. In addition Phelan draws attention to the role a witness may play "to continue a conversation that without your intervention would cease"[57] That those who have died or are in other ways absent may, through witnesses, have a continuing presence and resonance. This is significant when considered in the context of the parts of Athey's work, like *Martyrs and Saints* that were specifically devised in response to and as a remembrance of friends who had died of A.I.D.S. related illnesses. However, Phelan also points out it should not be assumed that by "produce[ing] witnesses rather than spectators" that those witnesses will necessarily respond in an ethical way or agree with the 'message' received. Phelan asserts that in this way, witnesses themselves resist objectification as a "product" of the performance.[58] This is also an acknowledgement that the witness and the role of witnessing or giving testimony remains a dynamic, indeterminate and unpredictable element of a performance.

But to return to the terms of textbook masochism, this desire to have one's actions 'witnessed', regardless of whether the witnesses respond as desired, may be interpreted as corresponding with Reik's notion of the demonstrative

feature, previously discussed as the desire to make an outward show of one's humiliation, degradation and pain. Although Athey is clearly responsible for constructing and presenting a performance not a theory, it is possible to draw what would appear to be clear parallels between the psychoanalytically interpreted masochist's need to show themselves 'shamefully' compromised and Athey's masochistic performance of intrusive, uncomfortable and abject bodily practices. That is, our contract, as spectators, with Athey and his performers, may implicate us as witnesses to his actions, which allows him to command a certain sense of socio-political agency through his enacted performances, should we, in Phelan's words, choose an "ethical response".[59] The agency that Athey's work may acquire through his audience's "thinking, talking, and reporting"[60] may not necessarily initiate dramatic or far-reaching changes or confirmation in the audience but may provide a subtle, gently corrosive means of agitation by challenging spectator/ witnesses attitudes and presumptions, so that through these images that Adrian Heathfield sees as "exceeding the understanding of the witness and consequently returns to haunt her", the witness may gain access to and have an "unthought thought [...] that has previously been kept out of mind or out of sight."[61] Through the delayed process of reflective engagement with what has been witnessed the audience may ruminate, assimilate, project, contest, forget and remember what has been encountered in this manner, giving this work a wider political import through this gradual but continuous dissipation and relay through witnesses.

Provocation

Throughout Athey's work, there is never any doubt that he is the central protagonist and director. His role as director enables him to ensure that his company is persuaded to carry out his instructions. In terms of theory, this action

in itself fulfils the criteria of the provocative feature of masochism outlined by Reik. Simply put:

> The demonstrative feature is characterised by the masochistic need to have a witness to his state of pleasant suffering. The provocative factor strives to bring about this condition.[62]

As Deleuze argues, it is the masochist who is responsible for educating his accomplice about what is necessary. If this aspect of masochist theory is transferred to a performance context, it could be said that in addition to carefully choreographing his co-performers, Athey tries to impart certain sorts of information to his audience, requiring from them a sizeable amount of emotional and psychical stamina to perform their task and to allow events to unfold in front of their gaze.

> By attaining satisfaction not only in spite of suffering but through suffering he ingeniously changes the Via Dolorosa into a triumphal road. In the same way the road to Golgotha became the road to eternal salvation.[63]

Moreover, by having painful actions inflicted upon Athey's person in a public arena an inversion occurs. Instead of being reduced by these proceedings he is enlarged. To have so much attention devoted to him alone has the effect of adding to his centrality and importance:

> The perpetrators of violence are subordinated to their victims, and are even described as being in obeisance to them, in positions of rabid worship the victims of violence are glorified by the violence they suffer, and are presented as well above their captors.[64]

Athey appears virtually naked with his signature 'Crown of Thoms' constructed from spinal needles. A group of women chastise him with ropes, whips and insults as he is herded across the stage stumbling and falling all the while. The focus of the scene is entirely on his predicament. All attention, all energy, both

from the women who surround him and from those who watch, falls on his castigated form. Through his suffering and degradation he is distinguished as the protagonist and master of all that occurs. His fellow performers are instruments to construct and support him on this pedestal of potential martyrdom. In this post-modern morality play all their actions concur with Athey's desires. Desires which transgress the limits of representation for masculinity, through his apparent, though not actual, subordination to a group of powerful women, and Christianity through his appropriation of imagery based on the life of Christ. Transgressions effected through the careful and deliberate use of humiliation, degradation, pain and restraint.

Pain and Restraint

As I have already noted in my introduction, Karmen MacKendrick argues that pleasure can result from the body's resistance to 'power' in its "more pernicious and insidious forms" [65]. That masochism and sadomasochistic practices work towards challenging the constructs that have been established around Foucauldian notions of the disciplined social subject.[66] As I have noted, this individual, the 'good subject', according to MacKendrick, is evaluated in terms of his/ her production and consumer value. This allocation of some sort of commercially definable material value to the individual is a dimension of subjectivity that is becoming more and more important in Western capitalist societies. Ron Athey's performances, presenting masochistic pain and restraint experienced across the exterior and interior surfaces of bodies that move in the peripheral zones of this economy, would seem to use performance as an acknowledgement of Athey's 'failure' as a 'good subject'. However, this 'failure', because it provides 'witnesses' with evidence of ways in which alternative subjectivity can be experimented with in spite of the restraints imposed by

internalised power structures that encourage conformity to socio-cultural norms, actually wins Athey and his fellow performers an ironic, perverse sort of victory.

Masochistic restraint may alternatively act as a means of objectifying the body. For instance, although Athey has not yet experienced any illness associated with his status, his material being remains under constant threat and probably under fairly constant self- surveillance. The silent presence of latent illness brings about a questioning of the body as a representation of the self. The failure of our physical being as a result of disease or illness may seem to emphasise a Cartesian / binary understanding of the mind and the body, particularly when the mind continues to function perfectly. In this context the body may be interpreted as an 'other', perhaps becoming an object of suspicion and distrust - how will I be betrayed? Where will the weak spot be? However, for Athey, this 'split' in subjectivity resulting from the psychological division of body from mind may be rectified through the use of pain and restraint. Physical restraint ensures that there is no escape from the imposed situation while pain draws the subject back to the corporeal as nothing else can. Thus restraint and pain may be used as a means of consuming the disparate elements of the self. This may occur in such a way that a temporary lapse in conscious subjectivity occurs that is beyond verbal articulation;

> There is a sense of being slammed, repeatedly, into the wall of oneself, against one's own ego boundaries until these break, and, with them, shatter the descriptive capabilities of language.[67]

MacKendrick's description of violent rupture is both brutal and liberating, it suggests that in order for a new subjectivity to become possible, the old must be fragmented - abandoned. By the same token I am suggesting that in order for Athey to deal with his potentially sick body he masochistically fractures and

destroys the boundaries of his own subjectivity through pain and restraint. For example, in *Deliverance,* Athey and two other male performers are restrained and hung on meat hooks, in a tableau that mirrors the image of Christ and the two thieves. Then other (female) performers administer painful and physically intrusive materials and substances into and through Athey's body. He does this first of all to lose all sense of his subjection to the constraints imposed by subjectivity, and then to achieve a greater sense of mind/ body integrity. Through a deliberate manipulation of binary oppositions in which Athey as mind / subject treats his body as an object to be restrained and to be inflicted with pain, he manages through a process (pain and restraint) to temporarily 'lose himself', highlighting and questioning Cartesian ideas of mind/body division. One of the ways he does this is by recreating a piece of his past as a drug user, Athey, in a now controlled environment, inserts thirty hypodermic syringes in a pattern up one arm in *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life*. These syringes, despite being empty, still induce physiological changes in both Athey and his audience as he presents his past in re-made form. There is bleeding too, that provides physical evidence of the needles intrusion into the body's interior. This may be seen as the body's own authority making it's presence felt, the blood flow a confirmation of life. So the body remains at once both subject to the mind's control and independent of the deliberations of the will so that certain physiological events, like bleeding, act as evidence of the impossibility of the complete reconciliation between mind and body.

So, paradoxically Athey confirms his subjectivity through the body that he has subjected to a masochism designed to relieve him of that subjectivity. The pain that may be used to 'shatter' and dissipate a bounded sense of self, may subsequently be understood as a process which confirms his subject status. That is, the pain and restraint causes a submersion of the self, a temporary loss

or disappearance of subjectivity beneath the waves of pain, but before overreaching personal 'limits' or succumbing to the enticing embrace of Thanatos and continuity, that is, really 'drowning', the buoyancy of the body returns subjectivity and discontinuity. This would appear to be a truly vicious circle. By enacting ritualised performances of suffering he attempts to both draw himself back to a controlling subject position but in doing so he also engages with the object-like status of his body. He uses the destruction of his subjectivity, annihilated by the process of self-inflicted injury on the object, to prove his subject status. This seemingly contradictory desire to confirm by destruction may be a manifestation of masochism that is a step towards what I have previously discussed as Mansfield's "total subject"[68].

> The masochistic subject includes its own object within it - repeating, imagining, creating and destroying, even being it. The object is always both interior and exterior to the subject - completely under control, but only by way of its own independent authority.[69]

This is more than just an attempt at objectification of the body. "The masochist's dream is of being his own object".[70] This impossible and paradoxical desire is, according to Mansfield, part of the masochist's whole effort to achieve a point where there are no binary oppositions but indifference between such traditional polarities as pain and pleasure, power and powerlessness, masculine and feminine. In this way he becomes his own 'other', his own object of desire.

> This subjectivity represents the highest aspiration of the masochistic subject - the subject to whom every apotheosis and abasement is always available; to whom there are no alternatives - who can operate power while remaining technically removed from it, even critical of it, who is, in short, capable of (being) anything.[71]

This is a subjectivity apparently released from any and all the constraints associated with fixed notions of subjectivity and it's orientating and ordering mechanisms. This allows for an almost schizophrenic (split-mind) state, which

may be considered liberating and empowering for those, like Athey, keen to reach to the limits of their embodied experience. In contrast to schizophrenia as a disorder, this state results from certain deliberate physical, psychological and political choices. That is, I do not wish to suggest that schizophrenia as a medical diagnosis is necessarily liberating for any individual that is afflicted with it, but merely that parallels may be drawn between masochistically induced fragmentation that may be used performatively to liberate, and states of mind associated with schizophrenia.

Conclusion

There is no question that Athey's own story remains central to whatever he creates. He uses masochism as a trope adopted by a number of sub-cultural groups because it allows him to explore the sensual limits of the body and to display his discoveries / fantasies in performance. As a white, gay male dealing with the unabridged aspects of A.I.D.S., his explorations have unintentionally revealed the fragility of the current construction of still dominant power relations based on heterosexual phallic power. His work addresses and reveals some of the fundamental structures that supportively surround many of the traditional binaries associated with the perpetuation of the status quo, particularly those associated with pain/ pleasure, masculinity / femininity, interior / exterior, sickness / health. I would like to suggest that performances like those of Athey and his company do have considerable socio-political power. Although these performances are a marginal phenomenon and, as has been demonstrated by the reception of Athey's work, the attitude to this type of performance is often censorious, I am arguing that the power of Athey's masochistic performance lies in its potential efficacy to begin to unsettle a hegemonic understanding of what contemporary subjectivity is about. What I mean by this is Athey's work reveals

the performative nature of masculinity for gay and straight men and the mortal, permeable nature of all bodies. The resistance offered by the performances of Ron Athey I believe is intimately connected with the notion of witnessing that I have discussed. The audience's exposure to what in many respects defies definition or exceeds representation, through this quality of excess Athey compels us as witnesses to revisit the sites of his pain/pleasure in ways that exceed the spatial and temporal boundaries of those original performances. This allows for a myriad of mutations in the minds and discourse of those who may now give testimony of this work. It is on this level that the work and its dissemination effects a subtle but persistent political subversion of patriarchally determined hierarchies that retain sexual and social binarism, and phallocentricity at their core. Ron Athey's use of masochism strikes at his flesh before death does, both confirming his mortality and defying the inevitable forces that have control over our existence through the fragility and temporality of the body. Through facing his inevitable death through masochism he embraces a temporary state of self-annihilation, he explores an area close to death without succumbing to it in a fashion similar to what Bersani terms psychic shattering. Masochism allows him to confront the likelihood of a premature death through his H.I.V. status and to use this as a source of creative energy to formulate works that recall the historic positioning of the artist, as one who immortalises him/her self through their works and remind us of the brevity of life, even if this reminder is for 'right now'. He does not seek solace in the religious faith that buoyed many people in the past, but determinedly creates his own mythology of convictions, drawing on the residue of his skewed Pentecostal upbringing, his self-abusive past and his empathy with graphic religious depictions of suffering. His shamanic remaking gives birth to his own form of body worship with the assistance of his willing disciples and fellow performers

and the all important audience of testifying witnesses to create a masochism that reveals both power and defeat.

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[1] Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures,* 1999, p121.
[2] Judith Williamson, 'Every Virus Tells a Story: The Meaning of HIV and AIDS' in *TAKING LIBERTIES: AIDS and Cultural Politics,* eds. Erica Carter and Simon Watney, 1989, p78.
[3] Bryan S.Turner, *The Body and Society*, 2nd Edition 1996, pp209-210.
[4] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p81.
[5] Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power*, pp70-72.
[6] Alphonso Lingus, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*,1984, p34.
[7] See Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry,* 1997, pp154-155.
[8] Fakir Musafar, *The South Bank Show*, ITV, 5th April 1998.
[9] Steve Mizrach, 'Modern Primitives' "Modern Primitives": The Accelerating Collision of Past and Future in the Postmodern Era, http://www.eff.org/pub/Net_culture/Cyborg_anthropology/modern_primitives.article
[10] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, (New York: Zone Books,1991),pp47-55, Matthew Goulish, 'Memory is This' in *On Memory* eds. Adrian Heathfield and Andrew Quick, Performance Research 5(3), pp6-17. (London : Routledge, 2000)
[11] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*,1994, p201.
[12] Film, *Hallelujah :Ron Athey A Story of Deliverance*
[13] Armando R. Favazza, 1997, p329.
[14] Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow, *The Lived Body*, p22.
[15] Armando R. Favazza, 1997, p226.
[16] Ibid., p153.
[17] See Judith Stacey's article 'The Neo-Family-Values Campaign' in *The Gender Sexuality Reader*, pp.453-470.
[18] Mark Harrington, "Some Transitions in the History of AIDS treatment activism : from therapeutic utopianism to pragmatic praxis', *Acting on AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Politics,* eds. Joshua Oppenheimer and Helena Reckitt ,1997, p275.
[19] David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance , Gay Culture and AIDS,* 1998, p9.
[20] For example Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, arguably still the most familiar theatre pieces that dealt with AIDS.
[21] Sander Gilman, 'AIDS and stigma', *Acting on AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Politics*, eds. Joshua Oppenheimer and Helena Reckitt, 1997,p113.
[22] In the mid-to-late nineties another shift occurred in the development of AIDS treatments in the form of new drug treatments. These new drugs and especially drug combination therapy presented the possibility of not only a longer life but of the potential to virtually eradicate the virus during the early stages of infection, that is, between the first third and sixth month of infection. (However, it is not known whether reducing the viral load with drugs at this early stage will improve the long term prognosis.) AIDS may therefore be considered less life threatening and more manageable, but David Roman fears this will lead to sexual complacency and has seen 'the banalization of AIDS' in theatrical representations. Roman views the critical and popular success of the musical 'RENT' as a symptom of this trend.
David Román, 1998, p275.
[23] Myer Rifkin in *Hallelujah: Ron Athey A Story of Deliverance*,1998

[24] Laurence Senelick, 'Skirting Christ' in *The Changing Room: sex, drag and theatre,* pp56-75.
[25] Mary Abbe, 'Bloody Performance Draws Criticism', *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* 24 March 1994, 1A ,15A.
[26] David Roman, 1998, p152.
[27] The details of this case are given in Chapter 5.
[28] Lois Keidan, *Theatre Forum*, June 1994, p64.
[29] Ibid., p59. Additional information from email correspondence with Lois Keidan
[30] Ibid., p59.
[31] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance : Live Art Since the 60s*,1998, p99.
[32] Film, *Hallelujah! Ron Athey: A Story of Deliverance*
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Jeff Spurrier, 'Blood of a Poet' in *Details*, February 1995, p111.
[36] Theodor Reik, *Of Love and Lust,* 1984, p241.
[37] Kaja Silverman: *Male Subjectivity at the Margins,*1992, p198
[38] Jon Erickson, 'Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary American Performance: The Wooster Group, Holly Hughes, and Karen Finley', *Theatre Journal*, Vol.42, no.2, May 1990, p226.
[39] Rev. Donald Wildmon, lettering concerning Serrano's Piss Christ, April 5, 1989, *The Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts*, p27.
[40] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* trans. W.D.Hall,1964, pp39-40.
[41] Ibid., "So serious an operation could not be accomplished by too many precautions. For the most part it was wished that death should be prompt, and the passage of the victim from its earthly life to its divine one was hastened so as not to leave evil influences time to vitiate the sacrificial act. If the animal's cries were held to be bad omens, an attempt was made to stifle or prevent them." p34.
[42] *The New English Bible,* 1970 Matthew 27:45-46 'From midday a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; and about three Jesus cried aloud, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?', which means, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?....Matthew 27: 50 'Jesus again gave a loud cry, and breathed his last'.
[43] ed. Peter Gay, *The Freud Reader,* 1995, pp301-302.
[44] Sigmund Freud, 1955, vol.7, p209.
[45] Film, *Hallelujah! Ron Athey : A Story of Deliverance.*
[46] Theodor Reik, *Of Love and Lust,* 1984, p233.
[47] Film, *Hallelujah! Ron Athey : A Story of Deliverance.*
[48] Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, 1986, p61.
[49] Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin,* 1998, p81.
[50] David Román, 1998, p152
[51] Ron Athey, 'Voices From The Front' in *Acting on AIDS: sex, drugs and politics,* , eds. Joshua Oppenheimer and Helena Reckitt,1997,p432.
[52] Theodor Reik, 1984, p242.
[53] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment,*1999, p17.
[54] Ibid., p18.
[55] Peggy Phelan, 'Foreword' in Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment,*1999, p10.
[56] Ibid., p10
[57] Ibid., p13
[58] Ibid., p13
[59] Ibid., p13

[60] Tim Etchells, 1999, p18
[61] Adrian Heathfield, 'Out of Sight' in *Void Spaces* by Hugo Glendinning and Tim Etchells, 2000, p21.
[62] Theodor Reik, 1984, p254
[63] Ibid., p363
[64] Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power*, 1997, p64.
[65] Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures*,1999, p102.
[66] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* , 1991, p221
[67] Karmen MacKendrick, 1999, p119
[68] Nick Mansfield, 1997, p33.
[69] Ibid., p33.
[70] Ibid., p42.
[71] Ibid., p42.

STIGMATA: MY BODY, MY LIFE, MY LANGUAGE

I am at the border of my condition as a living being.[1]

Since their first appearance around the time of St Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century, stigmatics have dramatically displayed the potential mutability of the body as it oscillated physically and psychically between states of integrity and perforation. The skin, as a surface that draws a boundary between the self and the other confirming and securing conventional notions of subjectivity, becomes a site of liminality and danger when it is ruptured by stigmata.

In this chapter I wish to develop the discourse of masochistic performance and religious referentiality by looking at the figure of the stigmatic. In particular I wish to concentrate on the stigmatic phenomenon and the work of performance artists Kira O'Reilly and Franko B, who have both used stigmatic-like marking in their work. I will first consider stigmata, it's relationship to body marking and masochistic performance before providing an analysis of Franko B's and Kira O'Reilly's work. I do this to provide a further inflection to my investigation of masochistic performance and to comparatively consider the gendered body and the gaze in relation to stigmata. This masochism is one that empowers the performer through their ability and courage to make an honest and open demonstration of vulnerability that is enacted through their bleeding and exposed body.

Although the performance artists, Franko B and Kira O'Reilly do not make conscious or deliberate reference to the tradition of stigmatics I would like to suggest that their use of stigmata-like wounding performatively draws on certain sorts of religious, medical and ritual traditions. The use of stigmata is very different for each performer both in terms of the performers relationship with

their body, their blood and with the audience's reception. I will look at the parallels and disparities in their work as it reflects their particular gendered identity and the audience's acculturated understanding of gender, and explore it's contemporary significance in relation to stigmata as an historical, religious and scientific phenomenon.

In order to carry out this research I will analyse Franko B's *I'm Not Your Babe* (1996), *I Miss You* (2000) and *Oh Lover Boy* (2001) contrasting these works with Kira O'Reilly's *Bad Humours/Affected* (1999). All use types of stigmata in a way that I am arguing may be understood as a structuring metaphor. I will consider their work within the history of the stigmata phenomenon articulating how their contemporary use of bleeding in their art may be informed by their Roman Catholic upbringing, and their exposure to religious art, but that their individual creative response is an articulation of the artists' personal concerns with exploring the limits of subjectivity.

Historical and Religious Context

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of stigma and its plural stigmata are given as:

> **1.** A mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron (rarely, by cutting or pricking), as a token of infamy or subjection; a brand. **2.** *fig.* A mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed upon a person or thing; a 'brand' 1619. **b** A distinguishing mark or characteristic (of a bad or objectionable kind); in *Path.* a sign of some specific disorder, as **hysteria** 1859. **3.** *pl.* Marks resembling the wounds on the crucified body of Christ, said to have been supernaturally impressed on the bodies of certain saints and other devout persons 1632.

The majority of the Christian church has been united in censuring the deliberate marking of the body, indeed Pope Hadrian in A.D.787 issued a decree against

tattooing[2]. This decision is apparently a response to the biblical prohibition in Leviticus (19:28) "You shall not gash yourself in mourning for the dead; you shall not tattoo yourself"[3]. However, it would appear that such bodily intervention although deemed to be contrary to God's word may also have been discouraged because of body marking's association with the 'primitive' pre-industrial body, or as Michel Thevoz suggests in *The Painted Body* because it is perhaps indicative of a regression to the primeval body and it's associated waywardness. The written-upon body stands in opposition to the invisibly inscribed ordered, productive, and repressed capitalist body.

As a result, to be marked or branded on the skin in Western Christian society may be seen as a way of singling out deviant individuals or alternatively, as a way to take up a badge of difference, which in many cases results in some level of social exclusion. For example in the city of Maine in the United States on the 15th October, 1651 Mary Batcheller, a puritan woman, was the first woman to be sentenced to be branded with the letter A for adultery[4]. While sailors were known to use tattoos in order to protect themselves from the pain of being flogged, often choosing Christian iconography believing that the flogger would be disinclined to vent the full power of his whip on images that featured or evoked Christ[5]. There are, however, some notably exceptions to the general disapprobation to tattooing and marking. For instance, during the late Victorian period, following the West's exposure to the newly accessible Japan, tattooing became a fad and was briefly fashionable[6]. However, before the second half of the twentieth century, for the most part those with marked bodies not belonging to the privileged classes were easily recognisable as, or suspected of, social or sexual deviance[7]. It is also important to note the difference between those who entered a particular subculture of marking as willing participants, and those that were forced to endure marking procedures in order to shame them for their

alleged 'crimes'. I would argue that it is also significant that in cases like Mary Batcheller, as cited above, in which both her lover and herself were whipped for their transgression, it was Mary alone who was branded.

The practice of marking the 'shamed' body continued into the last century, most notoriously in the Nazi concentration camps of World War II where prisoners often had numbers tattooed on their forearms. In this manner the skin became readable, revealing the individual in a superficial, obvious and permanent way, and ensuring that s/he was 'othered' as jew, gypsy, gay, or any other category then deemed to be 'deviant'. The inscribed skin may be understood to act as a physical marker of a person's particular experiences and/or a visual cue that may be used to discriminate one group of people from another, recording, as it does, both accidental and deliberate markings.

By contrast those afflicted with the bleeding stigmata in apparent imitation of Christ are notable for their religious piety, in fact as Ian Wilson writes in *The Bleeding Mind: An Investigation into the Mysterious Phenomenon of Stigmata* that, "Dr Imbert-Goubeyre's census shows that well over two-thirds of his 321 cases had taken religious vows."[8] These marks are commonly understood to be the result of meritorious selection and appear to flux and ebb as Wilson states

> It may be recalled how stigmata often exhibit a chronological precision in their appearance, as if to the command of an inner clock.[9]

However, as Wilson points out, it is clear from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church remains sceptical towards stigmatics and has only canonised or beatified a relatively small number, that being effected in this manner doesn't necessarily prove your predilection to be a saint. In fact the contemporary church has been disinclined to involve itself in the promotion of stigmata and

other ascetic practices because of the possibility that fraudulence may be used to stage stigmata or other physical signs of divinity, and/or that actions that in one context may be viewed as pathological self-mutilative behaviours may be confused with those actions carried out to achieve spiritual ascendancy. In addition there may be a reluctance to acknowledge such occurrences because of the borrowing of ecclesiastical iconography in sado-masochistic practice and publications. But it is still a phenomenon that intrigues and provokes because of its connections to an altered body, an active spirit, blood and marginality. Therefore, when a performer uses stigmata-like wounding as a trope there is already a complex set of resonances being put into play. I would argue that stigmata may represent a heightened spiritual and physical awareness - a sense of our temporality; but it is also a confirmation of the indomitable force /desire for life. Furthermore, when it appears on the body of a woman, stigmata may be interpreted as a manifestation of hysteria.[10] I will argue that it is this paradoxical combination of factors that lends these performances their unusual and compelling power.

Subject/Object

In *I'm Not Your Babe* Franko B covers his body in white body paint prior to his performances. The body paint has been adopted in order to neutralise an otherwise densely illustrated form - he has numerous tattoos. By applying paint he is perhaps allowing himself a little psychical distance from his quotidian body through the temporary and superficial erasure of the epidermal reminder of his ordinary existence; it may also be an important preparatory process for his performance. As a spectator I would also argue that the whitening actually has the effect of not only enhancing the sculptural quality of his body, but the completeness of his enclosure within this whiteness actually emphasises the

juts, ridges and recesses of numerous small cuts and incisions that cover his body. It also further underscores the brilliant redness of the falling blood gathering in pools at his feet. In religious depictions of stigmata there would have been hovering angels catching this flow in golden chalices as a prescient sign of the future sacrament of communion central to Christian worship[11]. Franko says he covers himself in white in order to differentiate himself from the Modern Primitive movement.[12] What it certainly does is ensure that there is nothing to draw focus away from the central image of his body. In this way his physicality is underscored. In his subsequent performances *I Miss You* (2000) and *Oh Lover Boy* (2001) Franko continues to present his body painted in this manner.

By contrast, in *Bad Humours/Affected* Kira O'Reilly is already present in the performance space, kneeling on the floor by a small altar-like stool. She is a slight figure wearing a long flowing white skirt, the flesh of her back is pale beside her long black hair. This is a different sort of exposure or demonstration because there is no paint to emphasise or obscure what she has chosen to reveal. She faces away from the audience but they may view her from any direction in this context, a feature that varies depending on the nature of the performance space. Her back appears like a blank canvas and at this stage there is no indication of what will occur but, as an observer, there would appear to be a certain sense of unease experienced by those who witness her, which is perhaps due to her apparently suppliant positioning in front of the stool, that may suggest a vulnerability, even a submission. At this stage, we have no idea that leeches will be attached to O'Reilly's flesh. O'Reilly's refusal to make eye contact compounds this sense of submission and arouses some potentially problematic readings of this piece which I will attempt to address as this chapter progresses.

In Franko B's *I'm Not Your Babe* Franko B arrives with a metal dish filled with blood, which he pours over his head. The liquid creates a floor painting of vivid red. A white robed technician moves through the dry ice that now surrounds him to find Franko B and release the stoppers in his arms that will allow his blood to stream. These stigmata already exist, the breaches were created off-stage so that the amount of outside assistance and intrusion could be minimalised. He does this in deliberate contrast to performers like Ron Athey and O'Reilly who carry out actions of cutting or penetration onstage. I would argue that this performance choice increases the apparent passivity of the image and strengthens evoked images of the sensational stigmata of Christian icons despite the contrived nature of his wounds. That is, to a Western audience acculturated with the collective memory of numerous depictions of Christ's crucifixion, such hegemonic images of religious suffering can rarely fail to inform their reading of his work. In the early church's renderings of the crucifixion, Christ shows a remarkable absence of emotion. His representation in art being required for teaching the largely illiterate audience of the church, not for producing a naturalistic portrait or realism. In something like an unconscious emulation, Franko B too retains a calm solemnity, not appearing to grimace or fight the sensations of the flesh as he stands largely motionless, blood flowing from his wounds, down his white stained arms and thighs, to the white canvas flooring. He expressed in his interview with me, that he wishes his audience to witness the beautiful images he believes he creates, not to preoccupy themselves with the actual process of rupturing the skin[13].

Interestingly Wilson argues that perhaps there is a link between the agonies of stigmatic penetration newly seen in the face and bodily contortions of the sufferer in religious art of the thirteenth century and the first recorded incidences

of spontaneous stigmata. St Francis of Assisi (1224) is believed by some to be the original stigmatic, although others understand this phenomenon to have appeared a little earlier on the body of the Blessed Dodo of Hascha in Frisia. From this time forward there has existed in fluctuating numbers, individuals with stigmata-like symptoms. According to the research of Wilson, who in addition to drawing attention to the more graphic depictions of Christ's suffering in art and literature notes:

> [A] Predilection for trying to recreate the crucifixion in a directly physical way, both via miracle plays and via exhibitionistic acts of self-mutilation[14].

Nevertheless, for Franko B, who receives and presents his wounds as a means of creating contemporary images, I am arguing that it is the quiet acceptance of his wounds and his resignation to this ordeal set up for public exhibition that becomes unsettling for an audience suddenly confronted with their own inertia, their failure to intervene in the events unfolding before them. As witnesses we, the audience, become conscious of others watching. We watch others watching and perhaps it is this watching and being watched which complicates our relationship with Franko B's work and raises questions about the degree of complicity and responsibility we have taken on in being present. We are witnessing the 'real' body bleeding although it is a staged event carried out with performer and audience consent / contract. Can the audience suspend their sense of personal responsibility for what occurs and rely on the 'authority' of Franko B, and his medics and assistants? Or does the responsibility Etchells suggests is desirable only lie in the aftermath, when the disruptive events of performance have become memory? Perhaps just as in 'real' life or in the biblical story of Christ's tortures there is a tendency to tolerate a level of voyeurism and collusion, an avoidance of getting directly involved in subverting

disruptive events. Most particularly when bodies, (our own and those observed), are exposed to 'real' or perceived to be real situations of physical risk, because of the possibility that we too may be marginalised, damaged or contaminated in the process or by association.

It is possible, that for some people, living in the still looming shadow of A.I.D.S. that has compounded gay prejudice, there may be a partial identification with such historical figures as Jesus Christ and other Christian martyrs, particularly St.Sebastian who were placed outside dominant patriarchal power for the strength of their beliefs, as if their beliefs were an illness, that polluted the mind and body and that could only be cured through a painful and publicly experienced death, thus ensuring that vulnerable others could not be 'infected'. In the historical past, during the rise and dominance of the Christian church's political and social power, such images were burned into the collective memory of all that witnessed them in religious art, read about them in the bible or spread news of these events by word of mouth. Initially, before Christianity became a more dominant religious force, this was carried out as a warning to all against the questioning of the hegemonic order, but later, with the spread of Christianity, such martyrdom became a symbol of sacrifice and redemption. I am arguing that in an image-saturated and secularised twenty-first century society the impact of such religious paintings is greatly transformed by the context in which they are viewed, so that individuals are more likely to encounter such religious depictions in a situation in which stylistic differences and discussions about the cultural critique presented, its socio-cultural placement and function take precedence over their former positioning as objects of devotion and worship primarily found in churches and cathedrals. However, I would also suggest that there remains a widespread residue of Christ's and other saints suffering in the cultural memory of the West that stands testimony to the power of this imagery, particularly within

the Catholic church. I suggest that Franko B, brought up and influenced by the power of colourful Catholic imagery and religious art, has effectively used the performance piece *I'm Not Your Babe* to recreate his own kind of ritual rebirth or remaking, re-inscribing the audience as the vital witnesses to his embodiment.

O'Reilly too appears passive once the leeches that have been carefully allowed to attach to her back by her assistant Eve and have begun to drink, she is there to wait and reflect. In an interview with me, O'Reilly referred to these leeches as being like babies. O'Reilly had apparently essentialised her relationship with the leeches as being akin to the deliberately imposed parasitism of motherhood, a relationship O'Reilly would be released from in time. I'm suggesting that if this was how O'Reilly understood her relationship with the leeches, their falling away (cadere) perhaps signified for O'Reilly a sense a parallel re-birth or affirmation of her own subject status. Similarly, the blood of the stigmatic may be interpreted as being used to symbolise spiritual rebirth through an emulation of Christ's sufferings. Her stillness emphasises her assumed objecthood, the activity of the leeches and their steadily but almost imperceptibly expanding forms contrast with her prescribed passivity. O'Reilly loses a little blood, but more crucially she is losing herself, releasing herself from the constraints of her customary experience of her own subjectivity, into an area of ambiguity and liminality, a place of masochistic suspension. O'Reilly admits in interview of her uncertainty and her sense of fluctuating bodily control[15]. As a woman the ambiguity is compounded by the exposure of her body. Under patriarchy, a female body is likely to be already socio-culturally read as 'penetrable'. O'Reilly allows two tiny leeches to further emphasis her potential and realisable invasion. In so doing O'Reilly apparently allows two parasites to assume a subject position to her, as object. This may seem a dangerous reversal, but it is, significantly, only a

transitory state through which O'Reilly passes in order to re-emerge with a strengthened sense of her own subjectivity, movingly empowered by the whole process of the performance.

Our experience of these performers is of the process of their transformation, occurring as it does in a manner that ignores the pressure for speed, for delivery of product so characteristic of late twentieth century consumer society. For instance in Franko B's *Oh Lover Boy* the performer lies on a large tilted square canvas frame, and the audience watch from their positions on a floor that echoes the tilted incline of Franko B's frame, forced to crane necks and reposition themselves in this reversal of the usual tiered seating convention. A design that seems to emphasise the potential flow of blood from the performers space into ours. The course of the numerous lines of blood are mapped across the white of the canvas. The body in all these pieces has been allowed to pace itself and the very 'liveness' of the performance is further underscored. We can leave the room, but we can't rewind or fast-forward events, his blood will flow at it's own rate to the floor or to the mouths of others. In this way Franko B's blood reasserts the material body's presence, its physical reality, through this vital manifestation, that is beyond the conscious control of the majority of people.

However, in *Bad Humours/Affected* I would additionally like to suggest that the image of O'Reilly's bleeding leech-bitten body is intended to draw upon the audience's knowledge of medical history and some of the medical associations implicated by the leeches themselves. As it is her own body that O'Reilly presents, I surmise that it is O'Reilly's intention to draw particular attention to how the medical world has 'read' and intervened upon the female body. Leeches have been used for medicinal purposes for the last 2,500 years and are particularly valued for their anti-coagulating and anaesthetising properties. A bite

from a leech may continue bleeding for up to ten hours after the leech has been removed, which make it a very credible simulation of stigmata-like wounds. On O'Reilly's body, we are reminded that to be 'bled' using leeches was a traditional cure for unbalanced 'humours'

> Humoral pathology is based on the notion that the human body contains four humours or bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy) and that good health depends upon these humours being kept in balance. Hippocratic theory suggested that if any one humour became predominant, ill health would result [...] to restore the patient's physiological balance, doctors needed to bleed their patients or to prescribe laxative, emetic or sudorific medication.[16]

Furthermore, for O'Reilly to use the title *Bad Humours/ Affected* for this piece would seem to indicate that she also wished the audience to make the connection between the bleeding she undertakes and the Hippocratic notion of the four humours. As a woman imitatively evoking an undertaking of this old fashioned method of 'cure' to restore her apparently lost balance, there are a number of questions to be posed and possible permutations to be explored that surround her surmised 'illness'. What does it mean for O'Reilly to use her body in a way that associates it with sickness? As a performative representation for public view, from what does she ail? If her actions can be read as masochistic empowerment, as I am arguing, how can these evocations of illness be recouped? In classical times it was believed that women were particularly prone to bodily disruptions and instability because of the blood loss caused by menstruation. Furthermore, the presence of a migrating or 'wandering' womb supposedly created additional problems:

> They [classical Greeks] believed the uterus travelled hungrily around the body, unfettered [...] producing a myriad of symptoms in its wake: a choking sensation, as if a ball were in the throat, called the *globus hystericus*; coughs and loss of voice; pains in various parts of the body; tics and twitches; paralyses, deafness, blindness, fits of crying; fainting; convulsive seizures; and sexual longings[17].

This understanding of the female body gave ground to the patriarchally supported understanding of women as inherently unpredictable and physically inferior to man, when in fact these symptoms are more likely to have been a result of women's lowly political and economic status within society – a ferocious circle. These Western ideas concerning the female body continued into the seventeenth century when an association was made between:

> Hysteria, a disorder that was believed to have its origins in displacement of the uterus and the accumulation of putrid humors[18].

By the time western medical science had officially determined in the eighteenth century that the female organs remained permanently situated in the lower abdomen (which seems excessively slow given that women had been dissected just like men since the second century)[19], the cause for women's disorders had been re-situated from the womb to the nervous system. This followed dominant medical representations that divided the body into female and male aspects. Muscles were seen as male, and the nervous system female[20]. However, a wide variety of symptoms and resultant female 'troubles' remained covered by the blanket term 'hysteria'. Coming from the Greek word for uterus, hysteria has thus always been connected to women in medical discourse.[21] It may be intimately connected to the tendency to pathologise women's bodies that may be evidenced throughout the history of western medicine and particularly since Charcot's documentation of hysterics and the psychoanalytic studies of 'hysterical' women by Sigmund Freud. Therefore, for O'Reilly to use leeches to effectively 'operate' on her naked torso becomes a particularly significant performance choice, that may be interpreted as a social metaphor for what amounts to the 'healing' necessary for the female form to be recognised as a potential site of power and individual agency. Here, I am adopting a deliberately essentialist position in my interpretation, following Geraldine Harris who

suggests in *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (1999) that performance art made by women "inevitably implies a critique of the politics of representation", and that in the deliberate underscoring of the material body as female, this position "necessarily convey[s] specific and clearly identifiable ideologies"[22].

This image, working, as it does, through the layers of historical, cultural and medical associations that have accumulated on and around the exposed woman's body may, on one level, be potentially as liberating for the female viewer witnessing and perhaps identifying with O'Reilly's undertaking, as it is for the artist herself living through this process. However, it must be acknowledged that her performance may simultaneously be a very difficult image for members of the audience to digest in part because of the sense of internal struggle O'Reilly undergoes as she waits in a state of masochistic suspension and blood collects; as if somehow her 'suffering' might outweigh her victory. But I would also suggest that this sense of conflict and uncertainty in effect strengthens the performance because we witness a woman successfully pushing towards and through her limits in a situation that she has carefully and deliberately determined. Furthermore, by ensuring that the images created are not readily assimilated by the viewer, as I have argued in the previous chapter, they act as an irritant for further rumination and reflection, which I believe is one of the important purposes of such work.

Bleeding and Male Anxiety

It is clearly evident that the bleeding associated with stigmatic wounds was a source of considerable anxiety and shame for many stigmatics who would often cover themselves in an attempt to avoid being revealed. So that in spite of the

supposed divinity of this 'gift' from God, many were reluctant to let people know they were bleeding.

> Like Jane Hunt, Padre Pio and St Francis, Lukardis [of Oberweimar] was reticent about her wounds, covering them with a form of mittens, and being persuaded to display them only with reluctance[23].

This may have occurred for reasons of religious modesty and humility, but there is also the possibility that bleeding and blood, however it is manifest, is associated with ambiguity and shame. This is backed up by the fact both Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio, two prominent *male* stigmatics, were notably reluctant to make their 'evidence' public perhaps finding blood's connection to femininity rather unsettling.

Furthermore, because O'Reilly's body is built to allow regular losses of blood, it has been assumed by some, as noted by Karen Horney in her book on feminine masochism, that the female is innately intended to withstand physical suffering (See Introduction p58). I acknowledge again the essentialism inherent in this statement, but maintain that menstruation and it's particular associations are important, inescapable and should be retained in the reading of O'Reilly's work as part of Schneider's 'both at once' reading of subjectivity referred to in my introduction[24].

Although Horney was mostly referring to historical incidences, the vestiges of this understanding of the female body and sexuality inform a contemporary alignment of women bodies with suffering. Therefore, I would argue that it is possible that O'Reilly's body is also interpreted in this light by some members of the audience who witness her actions. This impression of the female body is not countered by the actual history of 'genuine' stigmatics, where it was found that female stigmatics outnumber male ones by a ratio of seven to one.

> Dr Imbert-Goubeyre's nineteenth century census lists only forty-one men compared to 280 women [...] there is every justification for believing such a proportion to be a reliable enough guide[25].

This disproportion between the sexes may, in part, account for why stigmatism was sometimes seen as yet another manifestation of hysteria. This would fall in line with Wilson's researches that determined that although there remains many aspects of the stigmata phenomenon that continue to be inexplicable, it is clear from the demonstrations of Dr. Alfred Lechler that some individuals (most particularly women or those with multiple personality disorder) under certain conditions of stress may, through hypnotic suggestion, produce stigmatic symptoms closely resembling apparently 'genuine' stigmatics[26]. That is, not only are most stigmatics women, but stigmatic symptoms may be produced in those presenting with psychiatric disturbances, many of which have been interpreted as 'hysterical' in the past.[27] It is clear from the biographies of many stigmatics, outlined in Wilson's book, that many of the apparently spiritual acts of self-abuse may, in another context, be perceived as hysteria or even psychosis. Notwithstanding this, it is significant that the most famous and least contested stigmatics Francis of Assisi and Padro Pio are both men.

To return to O'Reilly's *Bad Humours/ Affected* it is immediately apparent that there are a number of inherent 'problems' with the presentation of a/ an exposed female form, b/ a woman bleeding, and c/ a stationary position that has her kneeling, face down quite close to the ground. Firstly, any display of the female body necessarily opens up the possibility of appropriation by what Laura Mulvey in the 1970s interpreted as the patriarchally defined male gaze[28]. If this were the case her partial nudity wouldn't neutralise or desexualise her body allowing her to freely express herself through the body, but would open her to male voyeurism or fetishism that may construct her as soft porn as I discussed in relation to Karen Finley in Chapter Three. However, subsequent responses to

Mulvey have made it clear that the gaze is much more multiple and complicated than Mulvey originally suggested:

> The spectator does not therefore 'identify' with the hero or heroine: an identification that would, if put in its conventional sense involve socially constructed males identifying with male heroes, and socially constructed females identifying with women heroines. The situation is more complex than this...Identification is therefore multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectators own psyche paraded before her or him.[29]

Indeed it is clear from the discourse surrounding the gaze that there can be no simple, unproblematic identification with or objectification of O'Reilly for the spectator, who, during the protracted time of the performance may move through and between a number of viewing positions. O'Reilly is accustomed to, indeed acculturated to the male gaze but equally is aware of the female gaze, both of which may become active or passive in relation to O'Reilly. So it cannot be assumed that a controlling patriarchal gaze is the only one that meets O'Reilly's performance. And O'Reilly does not wish to compromise her work by submitting it to self-censorship because of this issue, preferring to acknowledge that the spectatorial experience is multiple and fragmented. Furthermore, O'Reilly believes that an interesting dynamic is generated by the consciousness that the audience has that they can see each other watching this woman's body. The audience are not protected by darkness as they might be in a theatre setting. In this way they must acknowledge their complicity and, as with Franko B's work, they become involved in watching each other watching in a way that complicates their experience of this work, and perhaps draws attention to their role as witnesses to O'Reilly's actions. But in addition, O'Reilly remains speechless during the performance, and while the body may 'speak' when language fails, this absence of language may be interpreted as supporting a Cartesian conjunction of women with the body. However, this speechlessness may, on the contrary, be considered a rejection of the symbolic order. A refusal to even attempt to make meaning through the language of patriarchy.

Secondly, a woman bleeding 'on stage' and allowing her blood to soak her white skirt is undoubtedly provocative. Aside from the stigmatic considerations discussed, blood on the body of a woman, may well bear the connotation of menstrual blood. This is an admittedly essentialist observation, but as I have argued earlier in this chapter in relation to Schneider's 'both at once' conception, these associations need to be acknowledged as elements that complicate the reading of this imagery. Used widely in the 1970s performance art, menstrual blood may have attempted to glorify the natural cycles of womanhood.[30] But at the same time it reductively essentialised women, condensing them to a symptom of their biology and thus compromised their political efficacy in promoting women as self-determined individuals who had more to offer than their ability to reproduce. O'Reilly attempts to play against this pervasive background, revelling in her blood's free flow and her self-induced wound creation. She relies instead on the power of other, arguably, stronger evocations to counteract any simple reduction of her work. The wounds are clearly not intended to directly simulate the hysterical and/ or religious stigmatic or the leeches would not be evident to reveal the ruse. In fact the majority of the performance occurs in observing the transfer of blood from O'Reilly's body to the minutely swelling foreign bodies of the parasitic leeches, rather than the course of blood that follows their departure. I believe this part of the performance is of central importance to this masochistic action. The ambiguity present when the leeches sucked across the boundary of O'Reilly's body allowed her access to a sense of her own ability to experiment with a subjectivity that without stability fluctuated because of her actions. But when the leeches drop, O'Reilly is effectively returned to herself, the abject leeches having fallen away. Moreover, I would like to suggest that the use of masochism in this performance is partially concerned with reading against the grain of dominant female representation that

tends to read stillness as passivity, blood as victim-hood and a breach in the body as suffering.

O'Reilly's original starting position, an apparently 'submissive' pose, may well be seen as problematic but in fact O'Reilly uses this placement of her body purely for the mechanics needed to allow the leeches to take. This bent position is soon replaced with an upright one that remains relatively still throughout the performance. But again the passivity of this pose may well be interpreted as masochistically docile, a reading that lies in direct opposition to O'Reilly's intention, which is to endure and survive what she has set up for public view as an action creating a sense of personal empowerment not diminishment. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is always successfully projected but I would argue that by placing herself in such a manifestly vulnerable position while undertaking a prolonged, almost meditative, bodily performance, she pushes aside many of the more sexually voyeuristic connotations. I would surmise that part of this is achieved through the extended time of the performance that normally continues for around ninety minutes. Through this suspension, the viewer's perception of her has time to change and develop, just as O'Reilly's goes through a whole process of altered states. The combination of stillness, bleeding and concentration in the performer may contribute to a broadening of impressions that may have many permutations. This, however, presupposes that a viewer is tenacious enough to continue to watch for the entire duration, which is not mandatory.

It would seem that what O'Reilly's performance represents presents the audience with a complex set of interpretative layers. I would argue that the length of the performance and the almost stationary figure of the performer herself at least provides space for these layers to unfold and reveal themselves.

Furthermore, because conversation within the performance space is not actively discouraged it is possible that viewers may share their thoughts as the performance progresses which again increases the potential interpretative complexity of the piece. This is primarily due to the looseness of the performance 'contract' between audience and artist. The performance space in which the performance takes place has no designated area for observers, so no clearly defined or physical boundaries are created between audience and O'Reilly. This gives the audience freedom to move around the figure of O'Reilly, as well as to leave and return to the space as and when they wish. However, the space is not quite free, O'Reilly's assistant Eve here plays a crucial role as intermediary between the two, thus ensuring that sufficient room is available solely for the performance. Eve has perfected this role to a point where words are unnecessary to remonstrate with those who cross the unseen line into O'Reilly's space, instead she uses her eyes to ward them off. O'Reilly has also noted that the reception of the piece is crucially effected by other factors that had not immediately come to her mind. In one of her recent performances in Belgium, the intensity of O'Reilly's and the audience's concentration in one particular performance space created an effect whereby the audience remained silent throughout, producing an eerie ritualistic atmosphere. It would appear that the physical environment had, in this instance, augmented the communal effects of the piece, reinforcing how important an influence the architecture of the performance space is on the presentation and reception of a performance. Moreover, as a piece that may travel to divergent venues, this observation stresses the multiplicity of readings latent in such a live artwork, and how this is an important consideration for the performer who presumably is concerned with the piece's interpretative reading. This masochism would again seem to be involved with a re-negotiation of subjective boundaries that enacts O'Reilly's own journey to empowerment. Her ability to willingly allow for a temporary

collapse of her ego boundaries highlights a desire to explore the fluctuating nature of subjectivity in a way that confronts our dualistic understanding of the self and the other, but in addition O'Reilly's work also uncovers some of the difficulties surrounding attempts to challenge the representation of the female body through the use of masochistic art practices.

Masochism and Subjectivity

> The abject entices and attracts the subject ever closer to its edge. It is an insistence on the subject's necessary relation to death, to animality, and to materiality, being the subject's recognition and refusal of its corporeality[31]

At the same time as Franko B acknowledges his corporeality, he also empowers himself by freely submitting his body to an ordeal in a manner that could be described as masochistic. In *I'm Not Your Babe* his crouched then prostrate form permits the blood that was once part of him - the subject, to flow away from him, something to be left behind as evidence of what he is not. He is not bleeding to death, and yet his prone form could be read in this manner. In all three performances he has chosen to bleed, when most of us wince at the thought of our own blood being spilt. I argue that in using his body in this way he demonstrates the unease, ambiguity and sublime beauty of abjection. But it is through his apparently masochistic submission that he reveals a strength that is in some ways reminiscent of the custom of the Dinka spear-masters Mary Douglas wrote about[32]. In an episode described by Douglas the spear-master or priest voluntarily chooses his own time of death and is ritually buried alive. In making this active choice to die he physically and visually demonstrates to his people that even seemingly uncontrollable aspects of life can to some extent be subdued, and rendered less pernicious.

But Franko B is not dying, he is choosing to submit his body to a particular type of ordeal that may be read as a rehearsal of his own death, an acknowledgement of his temporality. Evidence in the form of blood, sweat, faeces, semen, urine and tears, enables us, using a Kristevan model, to define our separateness, the boundaries of our subjectivity, But the fact that these liminal substances, still remain residually overhanging us, underscores the potential of the abject to disrupt, undermine or even dissolve our sense of self. The wastes or ejected abject still retain the residue of their former subject, and it is this memory left in the remnant that promotes disgust and abhorrence. So in Franko B's ability to openly surrender himself to this liminality, he demonstrates an apparent fearlessness of the potential for physical and psychical rupture. This willingness to engage in actions that appear to embrace the abject and effect a dissipation of the borders of the self, may also be interpreted as an urge to vacillate on the edges of continuity and discontinuity, achieving a sense of what 'freedom' this loss of self or subjectivity might effect. This type of activity may be construed in many ways as antithetical to the current cultural climate in the West. Science and technology seem to be actively engaged in attempts to prolong existence, particularly youthful existence, for as long as possible, at the expense of ignoring our mortality. This may be evidenced in the increasing numbers of people turning to cosmetic surgery as I discuss in chapter six, and the attention being paid to the Human Genome Project, with all the perils and promises of changing the future possibilities of people - particularly their longevity. Franko B's stated intention is to use his performances to make the "unbearable bearable", that is, to force us to deal with his imagery which demonstrates the impermanence and mutability of our subjectivity[33]. It is an affirmation of life but it also underscores the necessary link with death tied up in our corporeality.

> But what I think is really important to me about it [performance] - it's almost where language fails I think and something has to be embodied, that the body speaks and language just doesn't do it[34].

The sharp relief of his body used in all his performances as "the canvas" and "site of representation" foregrounds the absence of verbal language[35]. No words are used or exchanged. I would argue that the language that communicates here is solely that of the body so that those who listen and watch must use other senses to compensate and to comprehend what is 'spoken'. But as I have already discussed, this absence of language may be problematic, particularly in relation to O'Reilly. As the leeches and audience consumed O'Reilly, she in turn consumed their undivided attention as witnesses to 'hear' her body 'speak', that is, the audience are communicated to through the actions and interaction of Kira's body and the leeches. Just as in Franko B's piece, words are judged to be inadequate, and in fact for a time in *I'm Not Your Babe* Franko B's mouth is plugged with a blood-soaked towel.

Perhaps this oral reference is there to remind us of the consumptive nature of performance and sacrifice, as if this blood is a consecrated wine that symbolically sustains faith and life, as it is believed to do so in the transubstantiation ritual central to Christian worship. In a profane context, the reintroduction of an abjected substance like blood into the body becomes potentially 'obscene', especially when it enters the mouth. This is a complete disruption of the Kristevan idea of the "clean and proper body", which forbids such bloody re-incorporation beyond the domains of medicine or accident[36]. In this way Franko B toys with this taboo boundary and effectively abjects himself.

> It is not about suffering. It is not the purpose to become a butcher or be macho, instead it is about not wanting to surrender [...] Nevertheless, there is always an end to it[37].

The silenced mouth is at least as disturbing as his flowing blood. And in fact this choking cloth is reminiscent of an earlier work in progress in which his mouth, having been sutured together (off-camera), is videoed[38]. However, although the forced closure of a necessary orifice may appear as disruptive an image as the consensual opening of a vein, it appears to have been done almost as an act of defiance. He enacts a masochistic provocation, that is, there is an implication that although his mouth may be sewn shut he cannot be silenced. In similar fashion in Franko B's 1996 piece *Mama I Can't Sing* in one section he is repetitively slapped in the face by another. In spite of the powerful blows he keeps returning for more, demonstrating his imperviousness, his power to overcome or transform these assaults. So instead of understanding Franko B as a victim we as spectators may come to admire his masochistic forbearance, his 'victory' in 'defeat'. In contrast to his bleeding performances these acts perhaps represent alternative attempts at highlighting the continuous oscillations occurring between instability and permanence, resilience and collapse that characterise his understanding of the embodied subject and that subject's subjection to societal pressures to conform.

> For me it is a process of purification that signifies total freedom, it is my search for freedom. When I realise a performance I feel myself to be free. It is an emotional process because in the end I feel that I have totally left my neuroses behind, that I have given myself totally through my gestures[39]

In the later stages of *I'm Not Your Babe* Franko B becomes increasingly introspective as the mass of fluid expands and his body's blood reserves are depleted. It would appear that his focus shifts from an externally directed stare to his internal sensations as he becomes 'lost' to us as spectators, flirting as he does with the outskirts of consciousness. This change of focus corresponds to his movement from an upright posture to a kneeling and finally supine one. His form partially framed by his exuded blood now seems reminiscent of victim

photographic shots, as if this were the scene of a recent and bloody crime perpetuated against the individual and yet Franko B understands this enacted gesture as a manifestation of his sense of freedom - freedom from the limitations of the self. The audience, on the other hand are left to contemplate the imagery created by Franko B's bleeding arms and what this deeply personal act represents. More recently in *I Miss You* (2000) and *Oh Lover Boy* (2001) Franko B has placed deliberate limits on certain aspects of his performance practice that suggests a change in emphasis in his current performance work. In an interview with me in 2001, Franko B said he is no longer interested in what he previously called "surviving" the experience of performance enacted in *I'm Not Your Babe*, whereby he in effect bled to a point where there was a risk that he would simply pass out, as described above[40]. Instead he has now determined that he can 'comfortably' bleed for a maximum of 13-14 minutes, and although this still entails sufficient uncertainties for him to continue to require the assistance of his friend Dr. Seth Bhunnoo (for the mechanics of venal preparatory as well as for certain monitoring functions), he makes a point of trying to minimalise risk. He thus takes control and responsibility for his own welfare, in a manner that perhaps is in some ways similar to the development of Abramović's practice, that I have argued matured from her early, predominantly 'risk' based performances through to a carefully considered use of masochism. Franko B too, it seems has modified and refined the way in which he works over the last 7 years of his public bleeding. The change also reflects a determination to refuse the pressures to produce a consumable performance 'product' that conforms to audience and sponsor expectation. That is, he is not interested in "entertaining" his spectators, nor does he create his actions to fit a predetermined time frame that is conventionally adhered to in a theatrical context where the audience may take into consideration factors like the length of the performance in relation to determining whether they got "value for money".[41]

This allows Franko B to remain true to his images and the actions these images provoke, rather than submitting to the forces of the market.

Shame

Another aspect of the work that both O'Reilly and Franko B are concerned with is the shame associated with the body, particularly in relation to sexuality and the parts of the body connected with excretory processes. Both are concerned with how this comes about as a result of acculturation from a very young age, even more emphatically in the Catholic households from which both performers have emerged, reminding them of how one is supposed to present or deny the body. Franko B's decision to perform naked and O'Reilly's exposure of her torso both demonstrate an attempt to defy this structuring force that is used to compel conformity. To reveal the penis as soft, fragile, and inert acts to subvert a collective acculturation that memorises the penis as a powerful and active physical potential. The potential 'shame' of the exposure of his physique would supposedly be derived from the 'femininised' appearance of a significant portion of the male body rather than a 'need' for modesty. Such modesty might necessarily function as a result of a Lacanian understanding of phallic power that I have considered in Chapters 3 and 4. That is, the phallus derives its strength from its invisibility: "the phallus can only play its role as veiled"[42]. And, as I have previously noted, although Lacan's suppositions declare that there is not necessarily a confluence between the penis and phallic power, as Jane Gallop notes in her essay which attempts to clarify the distinctions between these two terms, the one who anatomically 'has' the penis more often than not also possesses the phallus/ power.

> The signifier *phallus* functions in distinction from the signifier *penis.* It sounds and looks different, produces different associations. *But* it *also*

> always refers to *penis*. Lacanians might *wish* to polarize the two terms into a neat opposition, but it is hard to polarize synonyms [...] The Lacanians' desire clearly to separate *phallus* from *penis*, to control the meaning of the signifier *phallus*, is precisely symptomatic of their desire to have the phallus, that is, their desire to be at the center of language, at its origin.[43]

Gallop points out that although only men possess a penis and neither men nor women possess the phallus as it is an "attribute of power", as long as there is confusion surrounding these two terms "this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not"[44]. In terms of Franko B's performance, he in effect negates the power associated with the penis possesser. That is, his naked and exposed body presents him as an object on display; a role usually relegated to women. In this way he becomes the phallus rather than the possesser of the phallus, masochistically reversing the usual status quo. Thus he confuses the patriarchally established structure in a way that questions the penile basis of gendered identity. This action in effect plays against dominant representations of the male body by presenting an inactive penis on a relatively inactive body.

Claudia Springer, making reference to Steven Neale, surmises that in order to counteract the presentation of the images of the objectified male body, that may be considered to arouse homoerotic desire, violence may be used to reinscribe activity into the passively presented form, thereby subverting the potentially homoerotic gaze. This intervention makes the exposed male,

> The perpetrator of violence, thereby justifying the camera's objectification of his body [...] The male body is restored to action[45]

Claudia Springer uses as an example the film *The Terminator* in which the naked Terminator, after first being exposed to the voyeuristic gaze of the camera, dons leather clothes and studs as a sort of new body armour to protect

his vulnerability after having first destroyed their previous occupant. Thus the male sexual body becomes conflated with violent, externalised activity. In contrast to this cinematic convention, Franko B's performance work reveals a soft and above all vulnerable male exterior. I would argue that Franko B's work subverts the norms of the dominant media of film by prescribing disruptive penetrative action to be carried out upon his own body. Thereby he becomes the (indirect) violator and the violated, and so falls outside hegemonic understanding of male hetero and sexual activity that is preoccupied with ensuring an 'active' role is played by the male and that his 'actions' have a tangible effect on others rather than on his self. Instead I would argue that Franko B's work acknowledges, indeed embraces the gaze with all its erotic permutations, and the stigmata as evidence of violence, does not counter this passivity. However, in Franko B's two subsequent works , *I Miss You* and *Lover Boy* which both use bleeding from wounds made in his arms, there is a much greater sense of Franko returning the gaze which changes the whole dynamic of his work into something closer to the defiant gaze of Mapplethorpe's *Self-Portrait* with bull-whip where anal penetration is deliberately and categorically separated by Mapplethorpe's gaze from any idea that he is being submissive.

In *I Miss You* (Birmingham) Franko B walks the length of the performance space along a canvas causeway. The audience surround this cloth on either side in a manner reminiscent of spectators at a fashion show who are seated around a catwalk. This is a deliberate allusion that is reinforced by the positioning of all photographers at the catwalk's end, where Franko B, during his repeated walks to this point stops, turns and returns to his starting point, appearing and disappearing behind black cloth, so that the images are repeated again and again to an audience who are bombarded with multiple self-contained slices of

trauma. Franko B, however makes a point of stressing that he is not making a critique of the fashion industry through this piece. He says:

> The difference is that what is being paraded up and down the catwalk is not clothes, it is the body, it is my bleeding body[46].

During these walks, the blood from his arms drips on the canvas in a regular pattern. It also runs down his arms, legs, and torso, sticks to his feet in a way that makes additional impressions, actual and metaphorical. During the process of the performance Franko B is able to take in his spectators and his own impression of events in a way that was absent in *I'm Not Your Babe* because of the prolonged length of his bleeding during this earlier performance where his intention, as I have already mentioned, was to 'survive' the experience.

Further evidence of a change in emphasis in the development of Franko B's work can be seen in his most recent work *Oh Lover Boy*, where the movement and the repetition in *I Miss You* have both been eliminated, in what I am arguing is a further simplification of his previous work. That is, Franko B has succeeded in paring down the essence of his previous work so that Franko B's white-painted body is presented mounted on a canvas and the blood traces its movement from his arm to the floor in vivid red rivulets that literally pulse with the life of the body they have just left. During the first part of the performance we, as spectators, watch him and each other. Towards the end of the performance, he sits up and gazes at us, the audience, with great intensity and emotion - returning our look and reclaiming his subject status. We are assailed by his look, his self-possession, and his acknowledgement of our fractured gaze, spoken of earlier, in a way that underlines our witnessing role and throws something of the responsibility for this extraordinary spectacle back upon us. He is triumphant in his defiance, victorious in presenting these 'living' pictures. This

male has no embarrassment or fear of penetration, he embraces it, reversing an activity that amounts to a symbol of submission into a symbol of his resistance to patriarchal discourses of power. When he leaves the space an impression of his body remains, white on white, surrounded by smears and lines of red: "A bit like the Turin shroud...except that the Turin shroud is a fake!"[47]

Blood

Both O'Reilly and Franko B present themselves before an audience in order to endure a bloody bodily rite. As viewers we find ourselves suspended. We must all wait together allowing the bleeding to occur in 'real' time. As the blood comes the sculptural quality of their stillness (*Bad Humours / Affected, Oh Lover Boy*) or moments of stillness (*I'm Not Your Babe, I Miss You*) focuses us again on the physicality of these events. But blood, with it's potential associations with contamination, is an especially psychically charged fluid to employ, bringing to mind its links with bodily damage sustained through violence: combat, sex, birth, and of course, the 'pollution' of menstruation. During the 1990s Franko B appeared determined to resist interpretations that pigeon-holed his performances as 'gay'. In spite of this, then and now, the use of blood in performance almost inevitably carried with it A.I.D.S. viral anxiety. He originally strongly rejected this sort of reading but it almost certainly crossed the minds of those watching his work at this time. Franko B understandably repudiated these types of connections at this time, perhaps because of the way it may be used to create interpretative closure of this work. Moreover, in an interview with me Franko B made it clear he wanted his work to be understood as larger than this, that is, as something beyond the particularities of that cultural and political climate, which may agitate for its own political agendas and concerns. This reiterates the idea that he is trying to present something that is less specific and

more enduring. More recently, again in an interview with me, he was clearly less defensive about this reading of his work and acknowledged that his work was profoundly political, but that he didn't wish it to be reduced to any one agenda or interpretation.[48] I would suggest that Franko B's work is necessarily bound up with cultural politics, that he is the product of experience and memories derived from a unique context and set of circumstances that cannot be voided in the minds of those who watch him regardless of how little or extensive their knowledge of his work or of him. That is, he remains a product of this particular cultural climate, subject to its powers and hegemony, even as he resists, even *because* he resists. He suggests that his earlier reactions against the reading of his work was to do with an aversion to the 'political correctness' prevalent during the late 1980s / 1990s that he felt was only interested in validating contextualised art, that is, art that made reference to issue based concerns like A.I.D.S., the experience of women or black people. He reacted against what he understood as the hierarchy of H.I.V. infection, in which he felt those that contracted the virus through unsafe sex were valorised over those that become infected through intravenous drug use[49]. Instead he say he wants to create work that is relevant both now and in the future and is adaptable enough to be pertinent to many different audiences. This idea of allowing for an interpretative 'gap' resists any final closure of the text.

> I think things have to be flexible. It's like a bridge. A bridge has to have a gap for when the weather changes, if it doesn't have that it will crack.[50]

O'Reilly, also, must deal with a body that is already interpreted according to the social and cultural constructions of her audience, which include an essentialist interpretation of blood and women as inseparably connected through menstruation and child-birth. A residual sense of unease surrounds this type of

blood and bleeding. Women's lack of integrity is supposedly essentialist evidence of her closer links to the 'natural' body rather than the more esteemed intellect associated with culture and the integral male. This mind / body division plays into the 'naturalness' of according women a lesser status in the world, and a 'need' for shame to cover this evidence of women's sexuality and fertility.

> This idea of shame around sexuality and these very rigid codes around sexuality being passed on not just by male members of my family but by women - women would very actively perpetuate those ideas and how the body should be seen and not seen[51].

Franko B, has learnt the 'shame' of the body from another gendered perspective, he insists upon the need for the individual to feel like they own their own body and that there is nothing shameful about it. When talking about his work he refers to the "post-A.I.D.S. thing" that has attached increased amounts of shame to body substances because of their links with contagion[52].

> There's the pessimistic, the shame of blood, shit, pee [...]
> Fucking is dirty, pee is dirty[53]

However, as mentioned above, Franko B refutes any suggestions that his work may directly be categorised as concerned with the A.I.D.S. 'issue' or with homosexuality. In a recent interview with me, he said that although he had for some time been considering cutting and images of bleeding, it was as a direct result of anger and frustration with a legal precedent operating in the early 1990s that curtailed the sexual freedom of individuals who wished to engage in certain forms of consensual sado-masochism that led him to produce his first piece that used cutting and bleeding[54]. This confirms that his use of bleeding cuts was not directly inspired by or reflecting upon A.I.D.S. or 'gayness' but was to do with his reaction to the question of the ownership of the body. Franko B's lover, Stuart Barclay carved 'democracy' onto Franko B's back, and in a

reciprocal though unplanned action, Franko B cut 'freedom' onto his lover's back[55]. The new legal precedent over what could or could not be done to the body came about as an accidental result of the 'Spanner' investigation. This was a police operation attempting to uncover paedophiles, but who discovered instead a group of sado-masochistic men. These men were arrested, tried and some received prison sentences for inflicting 'grievous bodily harm' to other members of the group. As Lois Keidan points out, this made certain activities liable to prosecution, even when they were carried out privately at home.[56]

This decision has many resonances one of which calls in to question the rights of an artist to use the sorts of techniques Franko B employs in his performances. It could be argued that the technicians that assist Franko B by puncturing his arms and hanging his bled body may be seen to be contravening the stipulations of this legal precedent and are therefore acting criminally. In a later piece Franko B made another reference to the Spanner trial by having the words "Protect Me" incised on his back for the final sequence of the performance *Mama, I Can't Sing*[57]. These words became a darkly humorous, ironic reminder when they were cut into Franko B's flesh and bled on stage as a parting image. This was understood as an unusually literal statement from a man who had until relatively recently deliberately chosen not to provide information about what he produced, fearing that this would reduce the work and would not allow an audience to take what they wished from the images. I would argue that the use of these two words with their ambiguous interpretative connotations leave the viewer questioning their significance on a number of levels. Breaking through the skin exposing the flesh and blood beneath, Franko B has allowed the literal barrier of his skin to be lacerated leaving him open to both the sensations this damage brings and potential infection. Writing on the skin creates a literal reminder of the commonly held desire for self protection, but in a way that undercuts hegemonic

understandings of what protection is, or may include. I would argue that this statement is not a call to protect himself from himself, as those that pathologise Franko B's work might suggest, but a darkly ironic request to allow those with alternative desires to be protected from the restrictive prohibitions that may be used to curtail these activities.

Alienation

As I have suggested, Franko B does not perform to torture himself or his audience in an indiscriminate and uncontrolled fashion. The masochism he performs extends to certain prescribed parts of his body and is intended to make a visual impact through his careful choreography. Therefore, in *I'm Not Your Babe* his feet are carefully bandaged for reasons of safety. That is, so he won't slip up on the fluids that have left him. They will, no doubt, also protect his feet from rope abrasions when he is hung. According to Franko B, his performances in the 1990s were not about making a statement about society[58]. As I detailed earlier in this piece, this was in part a reaction against the reduction of art to a platform for overt socio-political statements. However even if this was not his stated intention it is impossible for him to negate or ignore the impact his work has come to have as a social metaphor. He may stand outside some of the dominant paradigms for gendered identity, sexuality and performance, but he is responding very much to the discourses that we are all subject to. That is, his subjectivity is as dependent on the cultural forces that form identity as any other individual that exists in contemporary western society : "It was worth being alive...but also, in a way you weren't alone".[59]

In the final sequence of *I'm Not Your Babe* Franko B hangs upside down, two feet in a single noose, his ashen form reminiscent of the imagery created in

Japanese Butoh, whose performers cover their naked bodies in a similar fashion. Butoh is a rigorous theatre form primarily concerned with the "space between birth and death"- and is based upon a traditional, ritual concern with the body as a medium of transcendence[60]. His pendant form echoing a foetal dependence, a connection to life, while at the same time his distance from the ground removes him from 'mother' earth and thus may be understood as rehearsing death. But as Patrick Campbell and Helen Spackman have pointed out, this may also be read as an inverted crucifix[61].This interpretation of the image adds weight to his stigmatic pose and reverberates the pseudo-Christian associations that remain, regardless of whether they are derived from his early upbringing or to a more recent exposure to such imagery in art galleries, gay pornography or in churches[62].This imagery emphasises our shared closeness to death, but it also draws attention to the death of martyrs that came about as a result of difference. The crucifix, forever connected with Christ in Western society, amongst other things symbolises an alienation that has resulted from a miscarriage of justice rather than a public display of criminality so that in the evocation of Christian crucifixion, there is perhaps in the minds of the audience a connection with the unjustified killing of an innocent man.

The images / pictures in the book *Franko B* , which in part records the performance of *I'm Not Your Babe* , reiterate suggestions of profound alienation. In addition to this performance record there are photographic stills that inform and extend our understanding of his work, aiding our remembrance of his transitory actions. Many depict Franko B as an isolated individual who is set apart not just by his 'social impotence' but also by his performed inability to physically operate in the institutionalised, white walled environment. For instance, in one he wears a breathing mask as if this is a necessary addition in order for him to function in this apparently sterile environment, callipers to prevent his collapse, bags of blood to sustain him. The medical paraphernalia

and his fetishistic use of it that impedes and restricts his natural movement becomes a metaphor for the limitations that are imposed upon his free functioning in society and is perhaps an empathetic abreaction of the situation of elderly people he worked with as a volunteer worker for Age Concern before training as an artist[63]. He appears like an exotic alien, a primitive 'other' exposed unclothed and hairless. There are no bloody stigmata here, but his body is still marked by numerous tattooed illustrations, that seem to emphasise his liminality. That is, the harsh black outlines that form numerous staring skulls on his body contrast with the pale fragility of his largely naked form. Although Franko B comes from a very particular background, one in which he was in part raised by the Red Cross, he clearly states in an interview with Betti Marenko, (1998) that he understands this sense of institutionalisation to be written on every body regardless of their past.

> All institutions like the family bombard you with their language that you either understand or you don't [...] But I speak to communicate. They are speaking to contaminate. We are constantly bombarded and no one is controlling it [...my performances] point out that : this is my body, this is my life, this is my language. It is difficult not to know of my background, but I do not want my background to become the centre of the problem, the work must exist for itself [...]My past is a different language.[64]

This perception of the disciplined body, 'contaminated' by the cultural forces with which it must interact, would seem to echo some of Foucault's ideas surrounding the "docile body"[65]. The docile body comes about as a result of being submitted to socio-cultural powers that effectively inscribe acceptable 'norms' on the body and mind through such established structures as the family, schools, asylums and hospitals. That is, that there is an accumulative process of socialisation undergone by every individual, in order to operate as a member of society. These cultural norms may eventually be accepted, challenged or rejected depending on the orientation of the individual, but no individual stands outside this operation of power.

In Franko B's latest work *Oh Lover Boy*, the simplicity and clarity of his imagery makes it harder still, as a spectator, to create any spatial or psychical distance from what Franko B, as performer, is trying to convey. I would like to suggest that blood loss initiates a consciousness of mortality and the fragility of physical boundaries and that Franko B is trying to express himself in his own 'language' without shame, and that by insisting upon being himself, his work raises questions about the foundations upon which western cultural and sexual assumptions are built. Franko B disregards the 'taboos' that surround all aspects of the body's functionality and boundaries drawing a sense of empowerment from his ability to free himself of the constraints of the 'docile body' by this masochistic provocation.

For both Franko B and O'Reilly, although they were brought up as Catholics and they consider themselves to be 'lapsed' in their faith, there remains a residue in memory following years of exposure to the rhetoric and stark pained images of Christian religious iconography. As O'Reilly puts it when discussing the matter:

> I've resisted it and resisted it and resisted it, but it's there and it absolutely informs my work whether I like it or not.[66]

Blood, in this context, is exceptionally significant as it is a substance fundamental to the doctrines of the Christian faith, with its vital connection to transubstantiation, the crucifixion of Christ and the "saintly and rather glamorous stigmata"[67]. And for Franko B blood from incisions is further politicised when considered in relation to ownership of the body.

But in addition to these dynamics there are more personal elements, that have to do with an artist's personal journey. For instance, when O'Reilly bleeds she sees herself as being consumed, taken into the bodies of the leeches. O'Reilly envisions this action, in an essentialist manner, as a sort of uncomfortable nurturing relationship.

> They do consume me [the leeches...] its almost like a maternal thing happens - they're my babies - you know - that I'm feeding them - cause they're these little tiny things and they made me think of those tiny minute embryos or even pre-embryo.[68]

The leeches become intimately involved with O'Reilly's body, she imagines their tiny vulnerabilities and is fascinated by their minute intricacies. It is not apparent in performance, but these small creatures are intensely interesting to her because of their hermaphromorphism. That is, their fluid ability to carry out the functions of both sexes. In an interview with me, O'Reilly admits that although she freely tolerates their presence, she anticipates and desires the moment when they will drop to the floor and her body will be released to bleed freely. For O'Reilly this is the moment of consummation, the moment of triumph and empowerment. The wounds are open and her stigmatisation has been realised. That is, as O'Reilly understands it, she has endured, survived and remains psychically integral in spite of the continued bleeding and in spite of pushing the boundaries of this integrity.

> Its like those two points on my body become - it becomes unbearable. There's this tension in me that's just waiting for this to finish, to end, and then when they fall off there's this incredible relief and then another sort of heightening of power.[69]

In this way the performance has reached a level of completion and O'Reilly appears strengthened by her ability to undertake this public blood-letting without relenting or succumbing to the pain or discomfort such a performance entails.

This performance acknowledges the permeable nature of O'Reilly's flesh. It reveals the inside and the outside of the body, acknowledging the fragile, almost arbitrary borders that separate these vital zones. This performance presents the raw 'reality' of the bleeding body, but also O'Reilly's desire to reach a liminal state that has her fluctuating between a sense of her own fixed subjectivity and

it's loss.

The skin is conventionally understood to provide a physical boundary that differentiates each individual from another. The skin's ability to contain and change according to internal and external circumstances make it a transitory zone that is continually changing and adapting, subject to internal and external forces. In addition, according to Didier Anzieu, the skin represents the psychical membrane that should ensures an internalised sense of unity and integrity.

> In the same way that the skin functions as a support for the skeleton and the muscles, the Skin Ego fulfils a function of maintaining the psyche. The biological function if performed by what Winnicott calls 'holding', i.e. by the way the mother supports the baby's body. The psychical function develops through the interiorisation of this maternal holding[70].

When the skin as a structure is disturbed the consequences have both physical and psychological ramifications for both the performer and the audience that witness this disruption. I argue that in allowing the internal space of the body to exude into the external in this apparently masochistic manner we, as spectators, witness through this miniature reversal of 'normal' bodily wholeness the raw emotional in the rawness of the physical. That is, a visceral connection may be made between the 'wounded' body on display and those who watch. The nature and intensity of this connection will naturally vary from person to person, one feeling empathy, another arousal, another fear or concern, but what I am suggesting is that the nature of spectator response, at least initially, is likely to occur at a very basic emotional rather than psychological level. By operating on what is essentially a pre-symbolic level, without the usual filters which erect protective psychic barriers where necessary, the viewer must adapt and assimilate images that strike at the heart of being in something akin to what I have previously discussed as 'psychic shattering'. Like the work of Franko B, we as viewers have to deal with what is portrayed because the residue of his

performance and performance artefacts remains etched as images in our minds regardless of our feelings and desires, we *must* make the 'unbearable' bearable in order to psychically survive. That is, the audience have to find a way to assimilate what may be considered intolerable, to make sense of what they have witnessed to a point where they can live with what they have watched in a way that perhaps allows a greater insight in to the limits of the physical and psychical body.

But however the audience is affected, the body of each performer when undergoing their own particular stigmatisation is interpreted in very different ways through the recollection of the embodied memory of acculturated gender norms attached to the male and female body. One aspect, in particular, that effects the reading of their two bodies, is the issue of control.

Control

While both these performers bleed there is an air of sacrifice, consecration, uncertainty, awe and perhaps more than a little fear. One of the reasons for this is the changing dynamics of control being put into play. This may be viewed in relation to control over the gendered body and control over the audience. As a male, acculturated to give the appearance of physical, mental and emotional control, Franko B maintains that in spite of his altered state induced by the loss of over a pint of blood he is never 'out of control'. What I want to suggest, however, is that for both performers an important aspect of their work is their ability to push up against their own limits, including the limits that are to do with control. This is not to suggest that either of these artists actions are 'out of control' in the sense that I have examined in relation to the work of Marina Abramović, where through the loss of consciousness, for example, Abramović no longer could remove herself from a flaming star (see page 64), but that there is a sense that Franko B and O'Reilly walk along their own personal control

boundaries. O'Reilly readily concedes that during the leeches long process of 'drinking' she experiences a wide variety of emotional states including a real anxiety that she *is* losing control.[71]

As I have argued in relation to Marina Abramović's work, to 'lose' control is clearly problematic in relation to my model of masochistic performance. However, a sense of the unpredictability of what these performers are doing is something I would argue the audience senses, responds to and mostly respects. Furthermore, although for O'Reilly moments of perceived instability may increase her sense of empowerment when she is released from the suspension of her performance, because of a good deal of oppositional criticism to Franko B's work, that has couched their views of his work in terms of psychopathology, it is less likely that he would even hint that there were times when he was not fully in control of every aspect of his actions during a performance. In the earlier bleeding work *I'm Not Your Babe*, I would suggest that Franko B does reach a point at which the audience stop appreciating the images created and start worrying about his personal safety. But by contrast in *I Miss You* and *Oh Lover Boy* this type of tension is not so extreme that it intrudes upon an appreciation of what he is trying to create. That is, he seems to have struck a balance between audience anxiety / suspension and audience veneration / pleasure. O'Reilly too has been subject to the type of criticism that wishes to frame her work as destructive self-mutilation. As a woman carrying out these actions it is possible that any tendency to pathologise her actions might be compounded by her gender. However, as Franko B has pointed out, it is just as likely that if O'Reilly's bleeding works are rejected by viewers for reasons that question the mental stability of the artist, these same spectators will reject Franko B's work too.

I would suggest that to push up against the boundaries of personal control is intrinsic to the work of both performers. Both set themselves up to undergo a

particular ordeal which gains its momentum and power through the audiences uncertainty that what has been set in motion hasn't been rigidly confined. There remains, however, the limits the performer has set in the sense that both performers use assistants who remain present throughout. The audience, as a vital part of proceedings, accepts uncertainty / suspension as part of the masochistic performance contract acknowledging that what is about to be witnessed has no absolute fixed predetermined shape, but at the same time is not 'out of control'.

Part of the awesome power associated with stigmatics is derived from the sense that what is occurring to them is both within, and yet bordering on, that which is beyond their control. Many would bleed with greater or lesser intensity depending on the religious calendar[72]. In addition some recipients found that when their stigmata were bleeding with the greatest intensity their actions seemed almost to transport them beyond a controlled reality[73]. It is unnecessary for the purposes of my argument to include a detailed analysis of particular stigmatic cases, however I am suggesting that these women, through their physical connection to what were understood as divine forces, managed to establish a personal power over their own subjectivity in a way that placed them temporarily beyond the usual dictates of patriarchal society. That is, in common with Franko B and Kira O'Reilly, the stigmatic body was essentially a resistant body.

Conclusion

I have argued that the work of both Franko B and O'Reilly use masochism to achieve a sense of personal empowerment. Their work draws attention to the way in which gender norms are inscribed upon the body. I have argued that Franko B's *I'm Not Your Babe,* can be situated within the context of current sexual politics, but if placed in the context of his recent work *I Miss You* and *Oh*

Lover Boy represents one stage in a progressive development of his bleeding works that have moved away from an emphasis on 'surviving the experience' to an acceptance and acknowledgement of what his body can do and what it need not do for the purposes of his art making. O'Reilly's *Bad Humours/ Affected* , in spite of the potentially problematic evocation of suffering submissive woman manages to critique the hysterical and cultural associations of the female body through her power to survive and triumph through persistent and constructive endurance. Both manage to manipulate our understanding of the stigmata for their own art making in a way that both borrows from their personal history, the Catholic faith and contemporary cultural iconography to create images that have an 'unbearable' beauty.

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[1] Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans., Leon S.Roudiez,1982, p3.
[2] Armando Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege:Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, 1997, p151.
[3] *The New English Bible*, 1970, p97.
[4] Frederick Newberry, 'A Red-Hot A and A Lusting Divine: Sources for the Scarlet Letter.' in *New England Quarterly,*1987, pp256- 264.
[5] Armando Favazza, 1997, p152.
[6] Ibid. p152.
[7] Michel Thevoz, *The Painted Body,*1984, p80.
[8] Ian Wilson ,*The Bleeding Mind,*1988, p72.
[9] Ibid., p125.
[10] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories,* 1997, pp32-33.
[11] According to James Hall's *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 1974 'In scenes of the Crucifixion one or more angels each hold a chalice into which flows the blood from Christ's wounds;' p63.
[12] Franko B, *Il mio corpo e mia casa,* Interview with Betti Marenko,1998, trans. M.Richards.
[13] "In terms of making work where there were wounds or their were stitches, it was very much about the image [...] you never see the person cutting me live [...] I was never interested in that' , Franko B , EGO Symposium, May 1st 2001.
[14] Ian Wilson, 1988, p18.
[15] Kira O'Reilly in an interview with the writer, 1999.
[16] Materia Medica, <http://www.home.gil.com.au/~bpittman/galen/materia.html>
[17] Elaine Showalter, 1997, p15.
[18] Elaine Showalter, 'Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender' , *Hysteria Beyond Freud,* 1993, p292-293.
[19] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned,* (London/New York : Routledge, 1995), p10.
[20] Elaine Showalter, 1993, p293.
[21] Elaine Showalter, 1997, p15.

[22] Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity,* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) p22.
[23] Ian Wilson,1988, p23.
[24] See p16 of this thesis
[25] Ibid., p62.
[26] Alfred Lechler, *Das Ratsel von Konnersreuth in Lichte eines neueer Falles von Stigmatisation* Elberfeld ,1933 trans. for J. Wilson by Iris Sampson. Ian Wilson, *The Bleeding Mind* ,See pp93-99.
[27] Elaine Showalter, 1997, p14-17.
[28] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen,* Autumn 1975, Vol.16, no.3.
[29] Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema', *Screen*, Vol.24, No.6, Nov-Dec 1983, pp 4-5.
[30] Menstrual blood was used to produce arts works by such prominent artist as Orlan and Judy Chicago, who created Red Flag in 1971by photographing a used tampon as it was removed . Others like, Shigeko Kabuta in performed her Vaginal Painting (4th July 1965) using red paint on a brush attached to an area close to her vagina to create her picture.
[31] Elizabeth Grosz ,'The Body of Signification', *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin(eds.) , 1990, p89.
[32] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 1966 reprinted 1991, p15.
Julia Kristeva,1982, p9.
[33] Franko B, talking at EGO Symposium, May 1st 2001.
[34] Kira O'Reilly, in an interview with the writer,1999.
[35] Franko B, at the EGO symposium, May 2001.
[36] Julia Kristeva, 1992, pp71-72.
[37] Franko B, *Il mio corpo e la mia casa* ,Interview by Betti Marenko, 1998, trans. M.Richards.
[38] Patrick Campbell / Helen Spackman, 'Surviving the Performance : An Interview with Franko B' ,*The Drama Review,* Vol.42, No. 4 (T160) Winter 1998, p72.
[39] Franko B, *Il mio corpo e la mia casa* ,Interview by Betti Marenko, 1998
[40] Patrick Campbell and Helen Spackman, 1998, p72.
[41] Franko B, *Athey and Franko B Chat*, Live Art Development Agency Archive,1997, p11.
[42] Jacques Lacan quoted in Amelia Jones's essay 'Male Artists Dis/Playing the Phallus' in *Art History* ,Vol.17 No.4 December 1994, p547.
[43] Jane Gallop,'Beyond the Phallus' in *Thinking Through the Body,*1988, p126.
[44] Ibid., p127.
[45] Steve Neale quoted in Claudia Springer's article 'Pleasure of the Interface', *Cybersexualities : A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace* ed. Jenny Wolmark, p47.
[46]Franko B, Interview by Gray Watson, 13th June 2000.
http://www.ainexus.com/franko/interview.htm
[47] Franko B quoted in 'No blood, no glory', *The Times*, 9th May 2001.
[48] Franko B, interview 20th April 2001.
[49] Franko B, *Athey and Franko B Chat*, Live Art Development Agency Archive,1997, p4.
[50] Ibid., p6.
[51] Kira O'Reilly , interview September 1999.
[52] Patrick Campbell and Helen Spackman, 1998, p72.
[53] Ibid., p72
[54] Franko B, interview, 20th April 2001.
[55] Ibid.

[56] See Lois Keidan, 'Ron Athey Comes to London' in *Theatre Forum* ,1994, p64.
[57] Judith Palmer, *The Independent*, 26th April 1996.
[58] Franko B, interview, 20th April 2001.
[59] Franko B, at the EGO Symposium, May 2001.
[60] Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* , 1988, p207.
[61] Patrick Campbell/ Helen Spackman, 'Without An/ Aesthetic: the unbearable beauty of Franko B', *The Drama Review,* Vol.42, No. 4 (T160) Winter 1998, p59 'he is bound and suspended upside-down - recalls the inverted crucifixions of early Christian martyrs.'
[62] Franko B, Interview with Gray Watson 'I don't believe; but that doesn't stop me going to church if I want to go, and it doesn't stop me appreciating a beautiful painting of San Sebastian or a crucifixion.', 13th June 2000. http://www.ainexus.com/franko/interview.htm
[63] Franko B, at the Ego Symposium, May 2001.
[64] Franko B, *Il mio corpo e la mia casa* ,Interview by Betti Marenko, 1998, trans. M.Richards.
[65] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*,1991, pp135-169.
[66] Kira O'Reilly, Interview, September 1999.
[67] Kira O'Reilly , Personal correspondence, 1999.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego,* 1989, p98
[71] Kira O'Reilly , Interview, 1999, 'I go through a very definite phase where I feel a fear thing' .
[72] Ian Wilson, 1988, "stigmata often exhibit a chronological precision in their appearance, as if to the command of an inner clock. Sometimes it is a particularly regular time of day, often it is a special day of the week, most notably Friday, the day of Jesus's crucifixion. It may be a special anniversary such as Easter." p125.
[73] These two examples are not atypical. "Domenica of Paradise (1473 -1555) Dominican nun whose stigmata purportedly featured what looked like nails penetrating hands and feet. Received 'mystical marriage' at age twelve, but also suffered apparent diabolical attacks, one of such violence that she was blinded in her right eye', Ian Wilson, 1988, p135, and "Domenica Lazzari (1815-48) [...] From development of stigmata in 1834 (which subsequently manifested every week), claimed neither to eat nor drink until her death. Crown of thorns bled on Fridays. Suffered convulsions and beat herself mercilessly with her fists [...] Lived thirty three years.", Ian Wilson, 1988, p141.

ORLAN, PORTRAITURE AND THE AUTHENTIC 'SELF'

> The vision of my body being opened painlessly was extremely seductive aesthetically...I found it similar to the light coming through the windows of a church illuminating the religious imagery inside.[1]

> The subject is unable to accept that its body is a material organism, one that feeds off other organisms and, in its turn, sustains them. The subject recoils from its materiality, being unable to accept its bodily origins, and hence also its immanent death.[2]

The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan, is a radical performance project designed by performance artist Orlan to take place over a ten year period. It began in Newcastle on 30th May 1990 but in 2001 after more than 9 operations, it remains incomplete, the project having mutated in other directions that I will subsequently examine. Orlan's original project was to render 'incarnate', via the latest surgical technology, a digitised image she created of herself combined with the features of five females taken from the canons of European art. In this way the reputably noble features of these women, excavated from the annals of male art historical representation were to be literally transposed and incised into Orlan's flesh. By examining the work of Orlan, particularly *Reincarnation,* it is possible to consider the surgical body as a performative site and a site of masochism in a way that provides a further inflection of my investigation of masochistic subjectivity. I will argue that Orlan's work, although it is conceived as representing the possibilities open for the moulding of one's physical identity, in addition draws attention to the widely practised socio-cultural masochism, that undergoing elective or 'unnecessary' surgical procedures represents. Some actions that I am defining as manifestations of socio-cultural masochism are activities or actions carried out / on the body, which may be construed as 'painful' in a negative sense, but which provide results which are generally sanctioned or even encouraged because they perpetuate an ethos of self-improvement and/or approved forms of self-determination that support 'ideal' notions of aesthetic subjectivity prevalent in Western post-industrial patriarchal

society. I do this because I want to differentiate between a masochistic trope that provides a 'resistant' or 'subversive' means to an alternative understanding of subjectivity based upon experimentations with its loss and restriction, and a masochism that operates within and because of the confines of patriarchal power in a way that supports that structure, and carries with it fairly fixed acculturated notions of 'desirable' subjectivity and its possibilities as detailed in my introduction.

Orlan as Masochist

In addition, I would like to suggest that Orlan's work, beyond it's ability to highlight socio-culturally prescribed acts of quotidian masochism, does, like the other performers covered, share certain masochistic features that conform to Reik's formulation in a way that suggests Orlan, too, engages in masochistic performance practices for reasons other than simply to underscore and parody hegemonic discourses of beauty; that there is also a personal efficacy in her actions beyond the socio-cultural politics of her appearance. By using her creative and imaginative facilities that I connected with the idea of fantasy in my introduction, Orlan used the *fantasy* image of her own face morphed with those of five other 'beautiful' or notable women as her starting point. In determining that her project was to be of an extended duration, it could be argued that Orlan deliberately created a suspension for herself and her audience that continually deferred the 'pleasure' and closure of completion. This suspension works to continually remind us that as people we are in a constant state of becoming. The disturbing and abject exposure to the viewing public of her body undergoing surgery and her perversion of the prescribed reaction to evidence of one's own corporeality - the bleeding wound, *demonstrates* how her work is rendered masochistically obscene ; something I will examine more closely later in this

chapter. And finally Orlan's demand to have this surgery carried out upon the flesh of her body, and the necessity of this being done by another – the surgeon, may be interpreted as conforming to the *provocative* feature. So, whilst I will subsequently interrogate the ways in which Orlan's work reveals the oppressive dynamics of socially sanctioned masochism, I believe her work can also be understood within a conventional masochistic framework. In spite of Orlan's claims to the contrary, there is a strong argument to suggest that she too carries out her operation / performance for reasons concerned with the possibilities of masochistic subjectivity.

I will examine the anatomical and surgical representation of the body in order to contextualize and comparatively consider Orlan's performance choices within art and medical historical paradigms because I believe this will help to identify the discourses against which the work takes place and hence elaborate its politics. Many press and magazine reports on Orlan's work would seem to have deliberately misconceived the nature of Orlan's project. It may be argued that this 'misrepresentation' is an expression of the level of discomfiture provoked by Orlan's work and demonstrates just how radical and problematic her challenge is to notions of identity and to the pursuit of physical 'ideals' within contemporary surgical practices. I will examine the response of the audience and critics in order to consider what sorts of social and cultural forces are at issue in Orlan's work. In addition I will consider the face as the pre-eminent signifier of identity and how Orlan's work may be understood as a provocative challenge to our understanding of subjectivity that works on a number of levels, not necessarily without contradictions.

At the start of her surgical project the work appeared to be a culmination of many years of artistic exploration into baroque and religious imagery. This was

manifested in works that deliberately attempted to undermine, by parody, socio-religious and phallic authority that was increasingly called into question in the West during the 1960s and 1970s as I detailed in relation to the work of Marina Abramović. First of all I will examine a number of these early works because Orlan herself has suggested that *The Reincarnation of St Orlan* represents a synthesis of many of her previous ideas[3]. For instance in the 1960s and 1970s Orlan conducted a series of building and street measurements known as *MesuRAGES d'Institutions et de Rues* in Paris using sheets from her bridal trousseau[4]. To calculate the length of a street Orlan used her own body as a new unit of female measurement or "étalon" and repeatedly lay down full length with the sheet underneath her[5]. In one performance in 1965 the streets she measured, named after famous men, were then compared for length in a parody of the associations made between fame, phallic power and influence. Once the measuring was complete, Orlan would then wash the robes she had specially made for the occasion and the sheets on the street, saving the sullied water in containers. During this part of the performance she was routinely verbally abused by passers-by that viewed Orlan as a woman of the streets rather than an artist. But Orlan was determined, as Carey Lovelace notes, "to stage the alarming spectacle of a woman crawling along the ground."[6] Later, photos of the performances, a video and the washed sheets were used to make a gallery display. The vials of washing water, as a residue of her performance, were sold as relics, and may be considered a precursor of her flesh reliquaries. Further, sheets from her bridal trousseau also appeared in a later performance. The piece consisted of collecting and then embroidering traces of sperm deposited on her trousseau sheets. This sperm was gained from a variety of sources, although originally Orlan had invited gallery owners to donate their "paint" for her canvas.[7] This was presumably intended to be a satirical comment on the artist dealer relationship, which Orlan felt was increasingly compromising

the autonomy of the artist to provide a radical critique of society and to "change the world", which has always been her acknowledged justification for art making.[8] The presence of the sperm on the sheets both highlighted the absence of blood traditionally necessary as part of the ceremonial flag waving of coital sheets following marriage to confirm the bride's virginity, while the many traces of different sperm worked against the religious conjugal mandate for exclusive sexual access and male possession of the female. For *Baiser d'artiste* (1977) Orlan installed herself on a pedestal outside a gallery. Her body was covered with a life-size photograph of her own naked body that had been modified to include a slot into which coins could be inserted near her neck, and a money box in her groin area where the coins would collect. Orlan sold kisses to the public whose coins would animate the statue-like stance she adopted for the performance into providing this lip service. It should be noted that the word 'baiser' means both to kiss and to fuck which may be seen to increase the ambiguity of the piece. Nearby, Orlan had placed a life-size papier-mâché statue (also with slot) of a religious figure, possibly the Virgin Mary together with a box of candles that could be purchased and lit in a manner similar to that adopted in many Christian places of worship, in particular when some sort of spiritual intervention is sought by the candle-lighter. In the centre was a sign saying Le Choix (the choice). Orlan, thereby, required the spectator to consider the exchange value of the sexual and sacred and make their choice. That is, in buying and lighting a candle in front of the virgin a certain set of religiously symbolic exchanges are implied: a prayer perhaps or a remembrance marked through the lighting of a flame. By contrast her symbolically naked body and the admittedly limited access to her mouth is offered up for the same price. Orlan simultaneously draws attention to the commodity value accorded to the interventionist work of the artist and the saint. This work aroused a good deal of comment from spectators and resulted in Orlan being suspended from her

teaching job at Atelier des Trois Soleils, an art school in Lyon. What I would like to suggest is that Orlan's desire to borrow from and parody aspects of Christian faith that places considerable emphasis on the importance of relics, iconography and the observance of rites of passage that perpetuate patriarchal power, reflects a continued concern with the belief system she was brought up with, even if that concern reveals itself in actions she herself calls blasphemous. Her apparent raging against such belief systems would seem to have become as much a part of her identity and performance work as the original faith of her childhood.

In addition Orlan produced *The Medusa: A Documentary study* (1978), an installation which seemed to play both with the idea of the mythical snake-haired woman who turned men to stone and with the sort of psychoanalytic theorising that gave weight to the mythology surrounding the idea of the 'vagina dentata'. Orlan presented her magnified genitals with her pubic hair coloured red (menstrual blood) white and blue to the curious public. The public was videoed as they entered and exited. On leaving the exhibition the spectator was given a text by Freud on castration anxiety and a copy of Courbet's painting of a medusa. Orlan was here clearly staging the female body as a locus of unruliness and male trepidation. The combined force of her exposed vulva and the invocation of the abject blood of menstruation demonstrates both her thematic concerns with confronting patriarchal constructions of women and subjectivity, and how the use of her body would always be central to her work. Finally, Orlan's fascination with what she describes in her manifesto as the intensity and catharsis that she had come to associate with surgery[9], following an emergency operation to terminate an extra-uterine pregnancy in 1978, informed Orlan's decision to use surgery as a trope through which many of these ideas could be brought together in *The Reincarnation of St Orlan*.

The choices that Orlan made during the early stages of *The Reincarnation of St Orlan* project may be understood as important indicators of Orlan's initial intentions. As Phillip Auslander has pointed out in his essay 'The Surgical Self' in *From Acting to Performance* (1997), to adopt a template based upon men's interpretative representation of the female is an interesting choice for a woman apparently rebuking the forces of patriarchal power. But according to Orlan the figures used in her composition are not chosen for their male-prescribed 'beauty' but for their personal attributes and strong characters.

> The nose of an unattributed School of Fontainbeau sculpture of *Diana* – because the goddess was aggressive and refused to submit to the gods and men; the mouth of Boucher's *Europa* – because she looked to another continent and embraced an unknown future; the forehead of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* – because of her androgyny; the chin of Botticelli's *Venus* – because of her association with fertility and creativity; and the eyes of Gerome's *Psyche*, because of her desire for love and spiritual beauty.[10]

This selection process would seem to suggest that Orlan understands the special qualities of these women to be somehow reflected in a specific element of their external features, otherwise her selection of images might just as well have been made arbitrarily. Why does she imbue her own self-portrait with these distinctive features unless she subscribes to the idea that somehow she is adopting something of these qualities in the process of adopting their form? In this initial process she would seem to be subscribing to one of the ideas she wishes to undermine – that is, that external appearances are not necessarily linked with or indicative of internal qualities, personality or the 'true self'. In fact Orlan explains:

> "It's the history behind the [character], not the face, that I'm taking." It is the history of the character, of the meaning ascribed to the face, that she desires to evoke.[11]

But a certain amount of ambiguity remains and may be one of the reasons there has been confusion, particularly in press reports, about her operations. Some reports erroneously suggested that Orlan was wanting to use cosmetic surgery to reach for the 'ideal' beauty of these women in an essentially narcissistic project. [12] In fact, as I see it, what Orlan indirectly draws attention to with these choices is the way in which we, in the West, seem to continue to draw upon some sort of model of physiognomy. This type of interpretative model of the face and head arguably remains residually extant in spite of originally being an Enlightenment concept popularised by the publications of men like Pieter Camper, who produced a book written in 1786, *The Natural Differences of Features in Persons of Different Countries and Ages; and On Beauty as It Is in Ancient Sculptures; with a New Method of Drawing Heads, National Features, and Portraits, with Accuracy.* It would seem from the evidence of this book that Camper was keen to 'scientifically' establish a hierarchy of race that 'naturally' placed the European at the pinnacle. Although the practice of physiognomy continued well into the twentieth century it is based upon a series of presumptions that are now almost universally discredited and rejected as a hopelessly unscientific, racist and sexist 'system of knowledge'. However, I would agree with James Elkins in *Pain and Metamorphosis*, that there remains in operation, on some level, a residue of such distinguishing systems because of the way in which even a twenty-first century sensibility cannot "entirely disbelieve that the face is a text for the soul"[13]. What I am aiming to suggest is that on some level Orlan's work draws upon and/or attention to the tendency to rely on the face, *exclusive of the body* and other factors, to uncover and evaluate personality and situate identity thus reinforcing, in effect, a Cartesian mind / body divide. So that the body is believed to be just a reflection of cognitively established qualities rather than the whole person being understood as an integrated site of identity.

Moreover, all the portraits that Orlan has chosen, with the exception of the Mona Lisa, are classical heroines depicted by European masters and yet her latest hybrid virtual appearance would seem to draw upon a myriad of non-Western cultural influences. How does she account for these appropriations that may be understood as a form of neo-colonialism? I am referring here to Orlan's recent research into South American (Pre-Columbian) traditions as part of her exploration into different cultural ideas of beauty. Both Aztecs and Mayans practised head moulding or skull sculpting, and it is this tradition that Orlan draws upon in her *Self-Hybridations* exhibition. This exhibition and it's accompanying book feature pictures of Orlan further transmogrified via the adoption of a piecemeal selection of head shapes and styles from these indigenous traditions blended with contemporary Western cultural styles. These images were produced using video and software technology similar to that used to create her original portrait so that she may experiment in a non-committal way with ancient and modern perceptions of beauty and taste on a trans-global scale. But aside from Orlan's decontextualisation of ancient and contemporary non-Western traditions, what sort of critique is she offering by creating a series of 'pick and mix' self-portraits? Although I do not profess to be particularly informed about pre-Columbian customs, as I understand it, such physical alterations as skull sculpting were important to the maintenance of systems of social hierarchy and for the creation of difference intended to separate people visually and thus to single out an 'élite' from the rank and file. This shaping had little to do with individual autonomy but everything to do with ideas concerning desirable aesthetics and conforming to the norms of ruling power. Orlan goes beyond any attempt to directly replicate such norms but instead extrapolates to make the computerised images, in her own post-modern fashion, in an apparent critique of the arbitrary nature of 'beauty' ideals. However, although Orlan

acknowledges the influence she does not apparently question the appropriateness of this cultural confiscation and how this may be interpreted as undermining the identity claims of alternative subjects who have traditionally been excluded from Western discourse.

In operating within the modern surgical epistemology, Orlan has adopted a medium whose method of alteration and self-refashioning is characteristically utilised by the monied elite or the disfigured victims of accidents, disease or war. However, increasingly cosmetic surgery has become a more affordable, accessible and 'desirable' means of self-transformation, which I will consider in relation to the sorts of hegemonic forces concerned with perpetuating Western ideals of beauty and 'normality' and with what I will argue is high modernity's sequestration of death, itself a symptom of Western society's inability to effectively deal with mortality and its association with the transient flesh body.

The Western obsession with the body as a perfectible project may be understood as a direct result of an inability to come to terms with our mortality and death. Phillip Mellor and Chris Shilling argue that in Western society the dominant ethos is based upon an individuated understanding of the self that originally developed from Protestantism's idea of every man's accountability to God. However, over time this concept of individual responsibility to God mutated and adapted to an increasingly secular society to become the right of the individual to develop or perfect the self according to the dictates of their own, rather than God's judgement. But in the wholehearted dedication to the development, improvement and pursuit of 'self' there has been a failure to provide sufficient means of dealing with death as a concept and as an inevitable reality.[14] The 'self' understood in these terms as a 'project' or 'work in progress' must inevitably fail because, by its very nature, the project can never be

completed. Cosmetic surgery within this context may be understood as a means of avoiding an acknowledgement of the limitations of individuated identity and the self. Anxieties about decay and death as a reality become sublimated or are forced to the periphery. The operation of socially sanctioned, but essentially masochistic, acts of 'self-improvement' in effect collude in the sublimation of death from contemporary Western society. And while these masochisms may claim to liberate and empower the individual, this liberation is more inclined towards reinforcing the hegemonic socio-cultural forces that prompted the surgery in the first place. That is, this type of masochism is not so much about the subversion and questioning of dominant 'ideals' and norms but conversely operates to buttress them.

Within the medico-scientific community cosmetic or aesthetic surgery is primarily understood and justified as a methodology for normalisation, a means to allow individuals who do not feel they physically conform "to pass"[15]. By contrast, Orlan deliberately aims to create difference. For Orlan the liberation she encourages people to embrace through surgery comes not from a successful operation that merely matches or returns the recipient's body to the norm or an ideal but from the act of re-creating their own portrait, 'personalising' their anatomy in any manner technologically and financially possible[16]. However, it is important to note that her aim is not to criticise cosmetic surgery as an option or choice, but rather to encourage others to use the surgeon's skills in order to create a desired/projected self-image. That is, Orlan suggests that her 'natural' face, a product of genetics, doesn't match with the face she understands to be her authentic 'real' face. In this way Orlan again would seem to adopt a rather Cartesian framework, using 'culture' in the form of techno-science to improve on 'nature' in a desire to seek the 'truth' of her appearance. In a ritualised prelude to Orlan's operations Orlan recites a part of the text of the Lacanian psychoanalyst

Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni's *The Robe*, a book in which there is a chapter that directly inspired Orlan's actions.

> Skin is deceiving [...] in life, one only has one's skin [...] there is a bad exchange in human relations because one never is what one has [...] I have the skin of an angel, but I am a jackal [...] the skin of a crocodile, but I am a puppy, the skin of a black person, but I am white, the skin of a woman, but I am a man; I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to the rule because I am never what I have.[17]

This text deals directly with the idea that the skin is purely a deceptive surface, a robe that covers rather than reveals an 'authentic' self and that the image presented to the outside world is just that - an image, without the substance and credibility given the 'real' Orlan as she 'sees' herself. The text points to the gap that is at the core of Orlan's project. That there is always a distance between our internalised understanding and perception of ourselves and the publicly visible self that represents our external image and interactive persona. This gap or split many be considered analogous to the Lacanian mirror stage, a stage in a child's early psychological development that Lacan formulated as the experience of disparity between the integrated image the child sees of itself in the mirror compared with the shortfall offered by the reality of the child's still developing body. Furthermore, Orlan's work has also been informed by her exploration of Hindu texts, "gods and goddesses who change appearances to carry out new deeds and exploits" and is alluded to in her second title for this work *Image-New Images.*[18] In particular the mythology that surrounds the goddess of destruction, Shiva and Kali, the goddess of death, who maintains that the body is "a costume to be shed."[19] These influences are key to understanding Orlan's initial starting point, which was to use medical technology to minimise the disparity between external image and inner 'truth' in order to create what Orlan surmises is her 'authentic' self. But in addition Orlan's literal disruption of the surface of the self - the skin, cuts through what Slavoj Žižek calls the "dress of the flesh".[20] This

action refuses to maintain the customary disavowal of flesh's reality that usually attempts to deny what lies beneath the skin. Orlan thus creates a break with the symbolic order that is normally maintained through the presence of integral skin. Orlan's disruption of the symbolic order as a conscious masochistic challenge to patriarchy is something I return to subsequently.

In viewing footage of Orlan's 1993 operation *Omnipresence* we see Orlan's facial skin has been anaesthetised and is, as such, capable of largely painless manipulation but the illusion of a "speaking autopsy" continues.[21] Her laid out body maintains relatively normal (if passive) functioning and the voice persists while the dissection and reassembling proceed. But during surgery, through her dislodged face, we as spectators are compelled through our scopophilic desire to see, to look at our own mortality, our own red meat. When Orlan's skin is lifted and we gaze within and under the mask that is her face the audience is consciously or unconsciously struck by the apparent lack of any material evidence of an essential 'self' (that is often associated with and signified by the facial area) or what Parveen Adams has called "the emptiness of the image"[22]. Because of this, Orlan's performance raises questions concerning our own sense of the locatedness of identity, as well as our own anxieties about technology and medico-scientific intervention. In addition, Orlan's work highlights the symbolic importance of the face as a site of patriarchal power because of its connections to language (the symbolic order) and communication. But first of all I want to consider blood and the opened body on public display as it is typically portrayed through televisual media and compare this to Orlan's work, which is also projected via a screen.

The Mediatised Medical Body

> Surgery, of course, occasions that icon of the medical drama, the operating-theatre scene: with its close-ups of masked, gowned and concerned doctors (the eyes have it); its cutaways to respirator and cardiograph showing the jagged tracing of the heartbeat flattening alarmingly; and the mounting drama of the doctors clipped instructions as bleeps of danger accelerate and tragedy portends, It's the perfect metaphor for the medical approach: high-tech medical skills save lives while the patient, insensate, is acted upon.[23]

Medical dramas on television have become one of the most popular genres in contemporary televisual entertainment. Debashis Singh notes that in Britain around 15 million people watch each episode of *Casualty*, 8 million watch *Chicago Hope*, 6 million watch *Cardiac Arrest* while 4 million watch *ER* (the most popular drama series in the United States).[24] Singh ascribes the popularity of these programmes as, in part, to do with the interest the general public has in the "potential for curing the most desperate of diseases".[25] The reality of the Casualty or Emergency department, where for long stretches of time very little may happen, is ignored in favour of the dramatics of frantic activity, organised chaos and casualties with serious multiple injuries.[26] But in the fictional world of medicine, it is the stories of the doctors and other medical staff that are in the foreground as they are faced with a wide variety of professional and personal dilemmas and decisions. The patients (mostly) comply with the treatment meted out, and when the body is opened there is a constant and deliberate oscillation between the object-like status of the body operated upon and the development of the patient's story as subject, which is used to interest and move the audience. In this respect the televisual world mirrors the real medical ward where, again, the patient is largely maintained under the authority of the medical establishment. Autonomous acts that challenge the overarching medical or surgical hegemony are, in most instances, persuasively discouraged with words, while at worse they require a call to security to render the patient compliant. In addition, both in fiction and reality the patient's wishes often become subject to the conflicting ethical and medical positions of doctors tending to diminish the

patient's sense of agency. In reality, the real traumatised body is not managed within a prescribed time slot, whereas in hospital drama the opened body is re-contained so that we, as audience members have our anxieties about such exposure, and it associations with death, allayed.

In documentary style medical programmes, like *Childrens' Hospital* and *Blinded* (2001) there has been a concerted effort to create a sense of the caring and effective face of medical authority arguably as a political act in the face of N.H.S. cutbacks. However, there still remains the tendency to disembody the person, so that only a fragment of the lacerated body is visible, framed through surgical greens. This fragmentation mirrors the traditional positioning of the real patient as that which is acted upon[27], and is understood as a means of assisting the surgeon in objectifying the body and allows for and "enable[s] closer and more exacting management of the condition of the body".[28] The documentary style medical programme, apparently recording 'authentic' contemporary techniques of patient management, gives the impression that hegemonic medical control over, and regulation of, bodies is being maintained.

Challenging Medical Authority

> To violate one's own body or subject it to invasive procedures is to violate nature and natural law, to offend against social propriety, and to encroach on the heavily guarded professional domain of medicine.[29]

Orlan's most widely known operation / performance *Omnipresence* (1993) was carried out in a private 5th Avenue clinic in New York. It was transmitted live to the Sandra Gering Gallery, SoHo and via satellite to a number of cities all over the world including Nice, Lyons, Paris, Antwerp, Quebec, Hamburg and Geneva. This performance attempted to stress Orlan's active engagement with activities and with what was happening to her body. During the course of the operation

she wrote and painted with her own blood, she did not winch, scream, faint or turn away from the materiality of her body, but merely dipped her finger (here no phallic brush was required) into that which had 'fallen away'- in Julia Kristeva's terms, painting with the abject substance of her body, writing with her self.[30] The blood prints Orlan produced on pieces of gauze were later exhibited as if to parody the sacred shrouds and cloths cherished by various branches of Christianity. Her impromptu sketches on one level effecting an odd sort of pastiche that may echo the melodramatic gesture of the victim of crime, who attempts to reveal the identity of their assailant by writing their name in blood taken from their own wounds. But unsurprisingly there is no external, unidentified perpetrator of violence to be apprehended and brought to justice. Orlan has instituted the injury even if she did not herself carry out the action, and she revels in the visible signs of abjection. Thus Orlan strikingly uses the blood from her surgical incisions both in her performances and in her artwork, treating her own bodily fluids like any other substance she may use in her art-making. The opened body and its fluids become a source for her creative activity not a curb on it. Orlan thus subverts any idea that she is a passive victim in the surgical theatre. In effect she enacts a masochistic reversal of the expected power structures in the medical sphere, her actions testifying to her attempts to maintain overall autonomy and control in a situation usually dominated by medico-scientific experts.

> Abjection is the body's acknowledgement that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social projections - effects of desire, not nature.[31]

Furthermore, if we use Kristeva as an interpretative framework, Orlan's use of blood, a potentially 'polluting' abject substance, may be considered a threat to the Law of the Father/ symbolic order which depends for its operation on a repulsive response to the abject rather than an active engagement with it. By

refusing to separate herself from the abject, Orlan perhaps enacts the possibility of a subjectivity that subverts the phallic and religious authority that underlies a "clean and proper body", finally acknowledging that the abject "is not external to the subject; it IS the subject".[32] This aspect of her performance repudiates the limitation and rigidity of inside/ outside boundaries in the social and artistic production of the self and in 'self-portraiture'.

The Face as a Site of Identity

Orlan's operation importantly takes place on the face. The area of the body most closely associated with our understanding of the self and our individuated identity. I will examine the privileging of the face as the signifier of identity and authenticity and determine some of the ways Orlan's work may be interpreted as a challenge to this. It is clear that the use of the face as performance and surgical site excavates many fundamental anxieties about the nature of and locus of subjectivity and identity. The results of Orlan's surgical re-creations subvert the 'integrity' associated with and embedded in facial identity. If, for example, we consider the altered face in relation to notions of moral character and deception, any radical departure from the 'natural' customary face that has come to be associated with an individual, effectively undercuts any moral imperatives associated with the 'natural' face, such as honesty, openness and authenticity. Orlan, by contrast, in reaching for the 'truth' of her appearance, through a series of mediations, effects a reversal of widely accepted Western notions of the 'natural' together with the 'natural's' alignment with 'truth'. Alterations made to the rest of the body do not inspire her in the same way, in spite of allowing liposuction to be carried out upon her body a number of times in order to create her flesh reliquaries. Orlan is quoted as saying in an interview with Anne Griffin:

> With the body, you can only go fat and thin. It's not interesting for me [...] The face is more interesting.[33]

Such experimentation with changing the body's shape is an area that has been dealt with by a number of artists, including Eleanor Antin who created *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1973) from photographs of herself taken daily over a five week period of dieting and more recently Elizia Volkmann (1999) who has also experimented with body shape by deliberately putting on and then removing poundage.[34] However such extreme measures carried out on the face for the purposes of art are unprecedented.

The face is also fundamentally linked with notions of humanity and ethics as well as personal identity. Emmanuel Levinas in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1993) suggests that it is the facial contact made between individuals that effects the prohibition on killing the Other, that is, it is much harder to kill another person if they face us because that contact forces us to acknowledge the Other as another being.[35] Those diseases or non-intentional injuries that disfigure the face are generally the most feared because of their ability to erase or compromise both evidence of our human-ness and an integrated understanding of our own subjectivity.[36] In addition when Orlan stages her (temporary) dis-appearance, our reactions perhaps underscore just how deeply imbricated we as spectators, remain in a Cartesian understanding of a mind / body divide. And that the superficial face and head is still understood as the primary location of identity and subjectivity and an apparent 'attack' on this region is fundamentally more disturbing than an attack on any other part of the body.

But perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this thesis is the consideration that if the body or more particularly the face is as truly mutable as Orlan's work

seems to suggest, the body and face may no longer be regarded as anything more than an objectifiable external skin or as Elisabeth Grosz terms it, "brute matter".[37] Moreover, Orlan's revelation of "brute matter" may also be understood to demonstrate that the skin of the body itself is more than a threshold, more than just a barrier between the body and all that is other than the body, a dividing membrane between inside and outside. It may be argued that Orlan's work reveals a continuity, that is, there is no clear division that can be made between our internal and external selves / flesh, that we are instead made up of a series of enfolding membranes and endless invaginations. The skin is not so much a superficial surface phenomenon but a system of infolding layers which constructs our entire flesh body. Or, as James Elkins suggests, the body *is* the skin and may communicate via inscriptions written from within.[38] That is, the skin as the body may express various physical and emotional states by way of "boils, blushes, and rashes".[39] However, those who may 'read' what is written on the face and body must be continually aware of the ambiguity of these messages.[40]

I would argue that Orlan's facial surgery, with its obscenely abject manipulations, highlights our dependence upon visual clues of communication, but more importantly her surgery emphasises how the very derivation of such expression is very much a matter of membranes 'speaking' from deep within, and that our bodies are a continuous surface of sensation, metamorphosis and communication. In effect, I would like to suggest that on one level Orlan's surgery would seem to confirm the indivisibility of the mind and body. Although Orlan adopts a Cartesian framework with respect to her conceptualisation of her project, the actual process of the operation may be understood as underscoring how subjectivity cannot be limited to a single site or surface of the body like the face. This would seem to contradict Orlan's emphatic claim that "the body is obsolete".[41] This statement remains as a reverberating aphorism that summarises her attitude to the body. The idea that the flesh is cumbersome and

inarticulate and ill-adapted for the technological processes that have been presaged for the twenty-first century. It would also seem to echo, ironically, the sentiments of religious ascetics who sought to transcend the flesh body that was believed by many to trap and inhibit the progression of the soul. This transcendence was often attempted through self-mutilative practices regarded as access routes to the divine.[42] Orlan, along with her contemporary Stelarc, remains determined to implement current advances in technology in order to catalyse her own body alterations in tune with today's advanced cybernetic environment. "Remember the future" says Orlan.[43] But Orlan's actions have little connection to the inevitable course the ageing face takes for most of us. The changes Orlan has had brought about are not the product of the relentless processes of biology, but a radical imposition. We attempt to control our destiny while always remaining aware that as time passes we will alter and change no matter how strong our will to resist. Our bodies are genetically pre-programmed to undergo physical changes as time passes. These changes result in our growth, maturity, ageing and death. But Orlan's surgical actions are acts of violence engineered to alter the biologically predestined integrity of her body. Orlan writes,

> My work is a struggle against the innate, the inexorable, the programmed, Nature, DNA (which is our direct rival as far as artists of representation are concerned), and God! [...] My work is blasphemous.[44]

Orlan is keen to emphasise that what she stands for goes against all that is "inexorable", that is, all the belief systems that have operated in Western society to place God on high overseeing events on earth, the dogma of Nature, the natural body and the dictates of DNA determining the future of the individual. But her "struggle against the innate" is, I would argue, in some way an acknowledgement of the impossibility of her desire. Her railing against the 'natural' body confirms its strength and its ultimate success in following its

programmed path, for the time being anyway. Genetic engineering may in time allow for the modification of particular genes, potentially allowing greater choice in certain areas of concern, particularly disease, but this type of choice is liable to be limited, not in small part by the finance necessary to undertake such alterations in DNA. That is, I would argue that the type of changes Orlan foresees will not allow for some sort of egalitarian utopia where features may be mixed and matched according to self-determined preferences, but is a process of modification likely to be limited to a very small proportion of the world's population, predominantly in the West.

Furthermore, it may be questionable whether such surgery, dealing as it does with the 'meat' body, will still be relevant in a future, which may well be, in significant part, carried out in cyberspace. In the disembodied world of cyberspace, Orlan's facial alterations to some degree lose their importance. Within this world, the re-creation of aspects of identity may be carried out on a daily basis without the pain or cost of surgery. I would argue that it is much more likely that people will use this sort of widely available facility to experiment with identity than the knife brandished by Orlan. This medium is perhaps more in keeping with the fluidity required of today's mutable existence and may be a factor in Orlan's apparent failure to go ahead with one of the final stages of her project, which was to put a new nose in place. A nose that was to begin half way up her forehead and was, in physical and ethical terms, to be the largest her face was capable of supporting. So, on one level, Orlan's project may be understood to contribute to a defiance of biological inevitability and embodiedness, but its also works to underscore that it is our embodied existence that must continually be returned to in spite of any reprieves achieved through the vicarious experience of computer generated virtual reality and Web environments.

I would also like to draw attention to one factor that would seem to work to prevent Orlan's specific subjectivity from dissolving and being replaced by something with an object-like status - her continued ability to speak. The conjunction of Orlan's extraordinary ability to maintain vocal control with her surgical dis-assembly somehow adds an aura to the mystery she is presenting. Orlan claims that her voice is the one part of herself that remains constant throughout these modifications. This would seem to suggest that Orlan most closely identifies her voice with some 'essential' part of her self.[45]

In reading aloud during her exposition, Orlan recalls the anatomical theatrical tradition prevalent in Europe during the late 15th and early 16th century where curious spectators, medical and lay onlookers alike, could, for a fee, watch as a corpse was dissected according to a text being read out.[46] However, in Orlan's surgical performances the once pre-eminent authority of medicine has apparently been superseded by Orlan's artistic one.

> The face is the Icon proper to the signifying regime [...] The face is what gives the signifier substance; it is what fuels interpretation, and it is what changes, changes traits, when interpretation reimparts signifier to its substance.[47]

The face itself is conventionally linked with speech and discourse, both of which are connected by language. Here I am interpreting language in Julia Kristeva and other French feminists sense of the word as "the threshold of all possible meaning and value", that is, as key to the symbolic order.[48] In this context we may also consider what Elaine Scarry has suggested, that is, that "moral rightness (in the Old Testament as in most human contexts) tends to lie with the most articulate".[49] Implying, not so much that morality may be linked with language, but that those who have greatest command of or access to language

also wield the most power or authority in determining what may be considered both morally and judicially right or wrong, good or evil. Unsurprisingly this control over language conventionally rests with patriarchal authority.

What I would like to suggest is that by simultaneously having her facial integrity obtrusively disrupted while reciting selected texts, Orlan cuts across the established relations between speech, faciality and the symbolic order. Orlan's vocal continuity, I am suggesting, is of central importance in these operations.

> When the face is effaced, when the faciality traits disappear, we can be sure that we have entered another regime, other zones infinitely muter and more imperceptible where subterranean becomings-animal occur, becomings-molecular, nocturnal deterritorializations over-spilling the limits of the signifying system.[50]

Through Orlan's loss of face, her "becomings-animal" she is, supposedly, reduced to something more objectifiable, something that lacks the access to subjectivity aligned with 'language', but her ability to speak denies this. We see her personhood, her face, contorted and cut free. As a spectator I have lost my point of focus and am at a loss to find a place to pin her down. I wish to fix her face within parameters, a symbolic order I have been acculturated to comprehend, because her voice continues to remind me of her 'singularity' amidst the blood and shattering instruments. In other words I am unconsciously trying to re-establish what I now perceive to be missing - an integrity of the physical and aural subject. I become confused - I turn mutely away. Orlan, without a 'face' uses language outside "the limits of the signifying system", asserting an apparently impervious and subversive control beyond the dismantling that occurs on her surface.

Furthermore, in spite of the 'painful' images that greet viewers of her operations, Orlan defies the pain we as spectators imagine she must be experiencing

through resisting a dissolution of language into the inarticulate utterances and cries normally associated with pain. Language, according to Elaine Scarry is usually the first thing to be destroyed by pain.

> Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.[51]

So at least part of the subversive quality presented by Orlan's work is due to this hanging onto language through speech. By contrast, the audience members may find themselves lost for words, that is, struck dumb by the 'obscene' spectacle of abjection. As if what is being witnessed exceeds the bounds of a familiar signifying system. Or as Julia Kristeva wrote in *Powers Of Horror*:

> We encounter this discourse in our dreams, or when death brushes us by, depriving us of the assurance mechanical use of speech ordinarily gives us, the assurance of being ourselves, that is, untouchable, unchangeable, immortal.[52]

In addition to our loss of speech, there is the desire to turn away reported in numerous publications.[53] This may be indicative of our deep-seated knowledge that we too are sinew and tissue. Her performance, on this level, operating as a kind of animated 'memento mori' for finally we all have to deal with the body's morbid corporeality despite her attempts at transcendence.

> The abyss marks the place of the genesis *and* the obliteration of the subject, for it is a space inhabited by the death drive, Hegelian negativity, the indistinct space occupied by mother and child in symbiotic dependence.[54]

Or perhaps as the audience's apotropaic reactions were an attempt to prevent their own absorption into the 'black hole' of these images, a desire to avoid broaching the liminal regions of their own subjectivity. A suppression of the sort

of psychic shattering Bersani wrote about and was discussed in chapter 4, that is actively sought by some masochists because of the temporary 'freedom' afforded them by this fragmentation.

Surgical Representation and the Anatomical Theatre

I would like now to examine the historical representation of the surgical body in the anatomical theatre of the past in order to ascertain how this setting with its cultural residues complicates the reading and interpretation of Orlan's work. This is important to my argument because it highlights how the conditions and spatial circumstances of performance have an important bearing on an audience's ability or inability to 'read' within this framework.

Representations of the body undergoing surgery may be considered the logical extension of earlier anatomical depictions of the human body undergoing dissection created in both an artistic and scientific endeavour to know the 'real' body. I would like to examine some of these images in order to go some way towards determining the sorts of possible connections and resonance these previous images of the surgical intervention on the human body may have upon the contemporary viewer's interpretation of Orlan's performances. I am not suggesting that audience members have necessarily had access to or knowledge of surgical imagery but that there may be some shared anxieties indirectly derived from a socio-culturally conditioned understanding of what it means to be 'cut up'.

> In the scientific grotto of the curiosities, the inside is turned outside and the dark secrets of the organic become disclosed as the bodily cave is opened up.[55]

Seeking out the 'inner man' through dissection is known to have occurred since the Middle Ages. Mary Russo wrote in her book *The Female Grotesque* that this urge was indicative of our scopophillic desire to gaze within and explore the mechanisms of life. "*What* the open body discloses is not as certain as the desire to see and find *out*."[56] And while both secular and religious authorities were always reluctant to grant access to dead bodies until the nineteenth century, those that were sanctioned for use in public performances of dissection were often those of criminals, who were doubly punished by their ritual dismemberment.[57] William Hogarth's 'The Reward of Cruelty' (1750-51) from the series *The Four Stages of Cruelty* bears engraved witness to the sort of horrors undergone by Tom Nero's criminal body who has, amongst other indignities, his eyes gorged and his innards fed to a dog. This visible posthumous punishment was presumably designed to reinforce judicial and disciplinary power. And when, particularly in the eighteenth century, there weren't enough criminals to go around, the corpses of the impoverished, whose bodies supposedly would not be missed, were used.[58] At this time it might be argued that to be destitute was on a par with being criminal. A contemporary link with the use of criminal bodies for medico-scientific purposes can be seen in the use of the executed murderer Joseph Paul Jernigan's body in the Visible Human Project in 1993.

> First, Jernigan's body underwent MRI scanning and computer tomography (CT). Subsequently, it was frozen to minus 70° Celsius and cut into 1mm-thick slices.[59]

The information gathered was processed to create a three dimensional computerised image of the body that can be fully navigated on the Net. My point in drawing attention to the sort of body 'performed' upon, is to suggest that there perhaps is an unacknowledged association being made between public surgery like that enacted on Orlan, punishment and the fear of the indignity of public exposure made under medical license. Through the act of public dissection the

unruly miscreant body of the criminal is re-incorporated into the body politic as 'docile' and once more subject to the power and authority of the state[60]. And that, although Orlan is consciously attempting to push beyond this sort of framing of the publicly experienced surgical body, this may be one possible source of anxiety for those who spectate.

In addition I would like to draw attention to the general absence of female bodies in the depictions of the dissection rooms or 'theatres' of anatomists unless the particularities of the female reproductive organs were called for. This bears witness to the universalising of the male body as The Human Body where no reference to sex is required. By contrast the female body, as a variant procreative option, would always be marked female and never be regarded as representative of human kind. These types of representation might illustrate the woman in her bedroom, as the engraver Charles Estienne did in *Dissection of a Woman* (1545) for *De dissectione partium corporis humani*. The woman lies back on her bed, an arm behind her head. Her legs lie open, genitals facing the viewer, while above this in the opened abdomen, the reproductive tract is on display. Much later in the late 18th century Clemente Susini's extraordinary sensual wax anatomy of a *Reclining Female Figure* also seems intent upon revealing more than the woman's internal organs as, quite unnecessarily, the woman's entire body, head tilted back, lips parted is rendered on a silk cloth that through her recumbent position recalls the bed sheet. Then there are paintings like Thomas Eakins *The Agnew Clinic* (1889) which records a nineteenth century operation presented to a large group of medical students and professionals. The ailing female body is exposed, explored and operated upon in the interests of her health, but more particularly to glorify the physician Dr Agnew, who is placed at some distance from the object of investigation, and is the real subject of the painting. What I hope to have made apparent from these

few examples is that when the female form is represented in the context of anatomical / medical science, her body is most often framed in such a way that it becomes clear that sensual pleasures are designed to be garnered from their bodies, by a presumed heterosexual male viewer, who is able to confirm his colonisation and control of women's bodies through such images. In contemporary medicine, technology is increasing being used to maintain a surveillant control over women's bodies, particularly during pregnancy and birth when the information gained from monitors and scanners often carries greater weight than a woman's own understanding of her body.[61] These factors suggest that Orlan's choice to 'direct' from her own 'theatre' becomes even more pertinent if considered in this light.

But it is precisely because Orlan has adopted the male dominated trope of surgical representation rewritten as presentation/ enactment, that Orlan's work has been met with an attitude of consternation and accusations that attempt to pathologise her.[62] An entire issue of the French psychiatric publication Vie Sociale et Traitments (VST, Sept- Dec 1991) was given over to debating and 'diagnosing' Orlan's mental state of health, concluding that she was suffering from artistic "monomania". Perhaps this widespread dismissive attitude has arisen to counteract any credence given her work, but it is also a testament to Orlan's success in asserting that "My body has become a site of public debate that poses crucial questions for our time" [63]. After all, for much of the time, she is literally calling the shots while under the knife, throwing into disarray the notion that the surgeon can act as God and reconfigure, but the female patient must be a passive mute object. Furthermore, she chooses a public setting for her transformations, so that actions that were previously carried out in secrecy and silence according to contemporary surgical conventions, have suddenly been unashamedly exposed and transmitted. In addition Orlan's 5th surgical

operation, carried out in 1991, further exposes and subverts some of the rites and rituals of surgery by making a travesty of this usually grave scene, so that the effect is of a carnivalesque parody of surgical protocol and authority achieved through a masochistically engineered reversal. All participants, including Orlan's surgeon Dr Kamel Cherif Zahar, dressed up for the occasion:

> The artist wore a black strapless gown, red gloves and a harlequin's hat conceived by Frank Sorbier [...]The surgeon's assistants wore black wet suits.[64]

Orlan kisses the surgeon, eats fruit and moves about the surgical theatre in a way that effects a reversal of medical control and dominance. She defies the usual surgical protocol by her free and easy behaviour that manifests none of the sense of tension and anxiety that is associated with surgical intervention. She retains her designer dress and jewellery during the surgery that may perhaps be interpreted as a parody of the traditional idea of what constitutes suitable attire for a visit to the 'theatre', as well as parodying the socially masochistic preoccupation with the dictates of fashion and its transient notions of what is beautiful.

Moreover, Orlan presented the healing post-operative face as a work in progress. She had herself ironically photographed post-operatively with a bunch of narcissi against a glamorous New York skyline, her swollen face bruised and barely recognisable, as if to reiterate the words she speaks during one operation "I am very pretty?"[65]. Her insistence upon being photographed every morning for 41 days after her 1993 operation would appear to be a deliberate and additional study in abjection and masochistic 'demonstration', albeit not an entirely original one.[66] Orlan makes visible the sanctioned acts of masochism endured in order to achieve another face. She reveals the hideous in-between body with all its colours of violence. The length of the prescribed healing process that she

documents might also be considered to echo biblical periods of exclusion or separation - Wanderings in the desert, Noah and his ark. It works in opposition to the usual before/ after representations of surgical subjects undergoing cosmetic surgery, where the suffering, healing body is rendered invisible, excluded from representation, in favour of the 'finished' result.

But do Orlan's surgeries really work to make her audience aware of what physical and psychical 'improvements' can be achieved through taking up the knife? Or does her work draw attention to the limitations of the surgical body and the importance placed upon the acquisition and/ or maintenance of Western socio-cultural physical norms? I would argue that Orlan's work and the reactions provoked by it, reveals the strength of these cultural powers to covertly enforce socio-masochistic practices in an endeavour to measure up to the body (face) beautiful. These internalised powers, operating in a post-Foucauldian manner, increasingly encourage members of society to place themselves within the template of beauty, attractiveness and fitness. In this way we ourselves may determine our individual weaknesses and our potential for health programmes, fitness regimes and cosmetic surgery. Difference and the changes wrought by the ageing body are now being realigned as physical pathology, often by those surgeons who work to a predetermined set of criteria or physical 'norms'. Norms usually based upon a white, youthful, symmetrical body and face. What Orlan's work does is draw attention to forces of passive acculturation that sadistically encourages us to measure ourselves against impossible, unobtainable templates.

So what agenda may be set if the technology of plastic surgery is used as an instrument of normalisation? Operations like the 'tummy tuck' for men and facial surgery for women, are designed to go some way towards regaining a youthful

identity. The rise in the incidence of cosmetic operations is indicative of the changing attitude and the potential for increased pressure to act upon one's 'imperfections'.

> In 1996 the total number of all aesthetic surgical procedures such as 'nose jobs, tummy tucks, and other improvements' exceeded 1.9 million, up from 1.3 million in 1994. This is about one procedure for every 150 people in the United States every year.[67]

To fail to act upon and 'improve' the self is, in parts of North America, rapidly becoming interpreted as a lack of regard for oneself. And indeed the promotional literature of many cosmetic surgeons on the World Wide Web suggest that failure to undertake such operations may mean that you are liable to be less successful when seeking promotion or employment. Thus, they suggest that to give yourself a competitive edge it is necessary to have both the right sort of body/ face as well as the necessary credentials for the job. In other words, there would seem to be growing tendency amongst those soliciting surgical services to market the idea of cosmetic surgery as an economic imperative, thus circumventing accusations of narcissism and self-indulgence that might otherwise discourage potential clients.

But who really has the choice concerning what is possible - the surgeon playing the role of sculptor or the patient? And who decides what part of the body is considered pathological enough to warrant surgical intervention? As Ann Balsamo points out in her article 'On The Cutting Edge: Cosmetic surgery and the technological production of the gendered body', for most recipients of cosmetic surgery, it is the "disciplining gaze" of the surgeon that determines:

> By first fragmenting it [the body] into isolated parts – face, hair, legs, breasts – and then redefining those parts as inherently flawed and pathological.[68]

Through a process equivalent to Foucault's idea of confession, the client presents their body to the surgeon as a site for rehabilitation, thus facing the choice of retaining their 'sick' body or the 'health' offered by a newly modified one. In this way, I would argue that the sense of personal agency that has encouraged an individual to seek cosmetic surgery becomes instead an imperative choice between what has become their diagnostically pathological body versus a surgically enhanced one. That is, medicine, science and biotechnology use their substantial éclat and authority to collude in the promotion and perpetuation of cultural constructions of Western beauty and physical ideals. Balsamo's research has shown that surgeons are encouraged in at least one textbook to look to classical art theory in order to better "evaluate all aspects of the deformity, visualise the finished product, and plan the approach that will produce an optimal result".[69] Clearly this advice reflects a very fixed agenda from within the medio-surgical profession as to what sorts of ideals are to be promoted. So, although I am not suggesting that cosmetic surgeons are responsible for the steadily increasing demand for surgery, I would suggest that they are often complicit in the assessment of essentially healthy bodies as inadequate and in need of alteration. As has been noted by Kathryn Pauly Morgan in her article 'Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonisation of Women's Bodies', it is disturbing to observe how normal variations and the ageing body have come to be construed in terms of problem areas suitable for refashioning.

> 'deformities', 'ugly protrusions,' 'inadequate breasts,' and 'unsightly concentrations of fat cells' - a litany of descriptions designed to intensify feelings of disgust, shame, and relief at the possibility of recourse for these 'deformities'. Cosmetic surgery promises virtually all women the creation of beautiful youth-appearing bodies.[70]

Morgan has rather radically suggested one means of revolting against the surgical redefinition of the limits of acceptable appearance is by having the body altered towards cultural constructions of the 'ugly' or the 'old' by having breasts pulled down rather than up or having wrinkles 'sewn or carved' into the face. She counters any criticism of this suggestion as 'going to far' by drawing attention to how the response to this idea reveals just how tight a grip cultural constructions of physical 'beauty' have on the modern psyche.[71] It is precisely this reaction that Orlan faced when it became clear that she wasn't seeking to remain 'cute', and that it was not a classical vision of beauty she was attempting to achieve, but a vision of difference.

However, although Orlan insists that this new surgical 'freedom' should be used not to homogenise all people towards an idealised 'beauty', but as a way of broadening the possibilities of the facial self, in reality much cosmetic surgery as it is practised today, however empowering it may be for the person undergoing the surgery, works to reinforce the importance of a particular type of Western acculturated appearance. This face has smooth, unblemished skin, and regular well-proportioned features. Furthermore, this is a face without the visible signs of age. This type of surgery may also enable any individual (with sufficient funds) to remove or modify both their physical resemblance to their family and/ or features of their specific cultural or racial background. This idea of modifying particular characteristics of one's cultural identity is already widely practised, and may be regarded as a new colonisation of the body of the Other. Operations like blepharoplasty performed largely on Asian women are designed to create the appearance of larger, rounder (Western) eyes by creating a supatarsal fold that imitates the Caucasian double eyelid. While this type of operation remains the patient's 'free choice' as advocated by Orlan, it is important to note that one sees few recorded instances of this operation being conducted to create single

eyelids on Occidental recipients. Orlan's project empathises how deep-seated this inclination towards fashionable notions of beauty is, but I would argue it does not encourage others to take up the knife in her revolutionary mould for financial as well as reasons of acculturated aesthetics.

Orlan has dealt psychologically with her altered visage through many years of psychoanalysis, in spite of acknowledging that psychoanalysis is geared towards gaining an insight and acceptance of the self rather than on promoting physical intervention on a surgical scale.[72] In a recent symposium (May 2001) Orlan made it clear that as a result of her surgery she does in fact feel nearer her 'idealised' internal self, and that she is, as a result, happier and more comfortable with herself.[73] To alter her facial features allows her an unprecedented autonomy over her identity and selfhood, but how is this changed face understood by other members of her family who perhaps shared one or more of her inherited physical characteristics that have now been erased? How does this alter her sense of belonging to a particular familial group? How has she managed to create a sense of continuity in her external identity between the inherited features she had and the family she inherited them from, and the adopted features she now displays? Or is this type of 'likeness' and visual sense of belonging antithetical to Orlan's project? It would seem that indeed she has found this sort of aggregation unnecessary or undesirable. Perhaps these type of issues have become subsidiary to the greater consequence of 'giving her body to art'. However, these questions do highlight the intensely personal nature of her project and the indivisibility of her artwork, retaining as it does Orlan as both object and subject, private citizen and public site. And she admits that the project has not been easy for her to endure, not because she is less conventionally attractive than when she started, but because as Orlan explains:

> My work has always been hard on me. It is difficult to sustain because it is a form of aggression against myself. Other people perceive it as a form of aggression against them and are therefore frequently very aggressive towards me. You have to be strong to withstand the reactions I get.[74]

This aggression is not justifiable but it is understandable if we consider the nature of Orlan's 'attack' on something as fundamental to contemporary subjectivity as cultural constructions of the 'desirable' face/ body.

The Face and the Law

Following her final operation in Japan for an enlarged nose that was scheduled for 2000 but was not actually carried out, Orlan was to place herself in the hands of an advertising agency that was to be given the job of renaming her. Orlan was to then employ a lawyer to argue that the changes in her physical appearance warrant a new name and new identity papers. This attempt at legal re-creation, whether she was to win or lose, constitutes an important part of her project, signifying as it does, the culmination of over ten years work. Her challenge to the status quo will be extended beyond theatre to the courtroom opening her work to further public debate as to whether her new appearance is sufficiently far removed from her original appearance for her to be legally understood to be another person. This is what Orlan understands to be her transgender transformation – a woman to woman metamorphosis. Orlan's attempts to be renamed will draw attention to the real ambiguity and the potential legal ambiguity that surrounds attempts to obtain a definitive method of locating and fixing the substance of identity. By taking the issue of her identity into a legal setting, Orlan uses masochistic means to parody the law and the social contract designed to maintain and reinforce a sense of the citizen's fixed subjectivity understood to be core to a stable society.

The Final Gift

In addition Orlan has often stated that she has donated her body to art.[75] She means this literally. Her body, when dead, will be preserved as part of a video display in the bloodless atmosphere of a French museum turned mausoleum. Where modernity sanitised, encouraged 'hygiene' and withdrew the corpse from view, Orlan intends to lay open her lifeless form to all that care to look. On one level, this action could be interpreted as a means of establishing a permanent memorial for herself as an individual. This could undoubtedly be more simply done with a tombstone (presumably something grandiose and baroque) if that was her intention, and would thus avoid her exposure. But a tombstone is no monument for a woman like Orlan, the stability and sterility of such a phallic edifice is in flagrant opposition to all that Orlan represents as a continually mutable post-modern cyber-persona. Besides, as has become clear from her surgeries, Orlan has no fear of exposure, and this is perhaps another reason her work disrupts. By announcing her intention of adopting the future trope of the corpse, she further takes on the mantel of both the abject and the obscene body. But just how should we receive such a donation? We have the bodies of the ancient past dredged from bogs, dug from tombs and chiselled from mountainscapes, their exhumed remains the focus of intensive research, but also of moral debate regarding their 'right' to permanent burial and privacy from the eyes of the curious. How will Orlan's body be situated in this light? For although she has stated her desire, what other author (ities) will come into play when she no longer can?

Facing Death

Together medical science and technology has virtually erased, certainly subverted death as it is currently understood, for as Baudrillard writes, in post-industrial Western society death has essentially become pathological.

> Today, it is not normal to be dead [...]To be dead is an unthinkable anomaly; nothing else is as offensive as this. Death is a delinquency, and an incurable deviancy.[76]

As both a woman and a corpse, she will create an unprecedented affront to notions of the correct place for the dead. She is not part of the tradition of the long dead, the retrieved dead excavated from ancient civilisations - who had no voice to question their disinternment, nor is she to be frozen for some future world where technology may again set her in motion. Orlan will bring the living face-to-face with her 'living' death, in effect Orlan will 'stage' the obscene, present Kristeva's abject fallen cadaver re-inscribed as art.[77] In having her body preserved in this manner Orlan perhaps reiterates her desire to maintain a position of ambiguity. But I would suggest that ultimately her defiance emphasises the inexorability of life's one certainty. Orlan's attempt to ensure her own 'immortality' is perhaps instead a further parody of those who have been beatified by the Christian church and as such take on the mantle of the truly holy.

As I have mentioned, Orlan in spite of her 'blasphemy', does seem to share a religious ascetic's desire to reach beyond the limitations of the body and its obsolete flesh and, of course, the truly holy experience the incorruptibility of the flesh in death.[78] In this sense her embalmed remains will be ordained as sacred. This sacredness is not so much in the spiritual sense as in the institutionalised sense. By making herself an exhibit she will be finally assimilated within the bourgeois framework of artistic enterprise. This last offering of herself would seem to be the endgame of her endeavour but one that's form of closure

rewrites the traditional pattern of art rebel returned as hero.

Conclusion

Orlan's work is provocative not only because it works on a number of not always compatible levels but also becomes it represents a point of departure for voicing many of the anxieties that now surround the mutable body. For instance will plastic surgery become as widespread and commonplace as other disciplinary regimes that promote socio-cultural forms of masochistic practise? In the future will refusing to have plastic surgery brand you as deviant, just as women refusing to wear a corset were deemed aberrant in the 19th century? Is surgery likely to create unique individuals or a greater predominance of 'ideal' clones? These questions and many others have become part of the discourse that circulates around this work, increasing its potential political efficacy as people are confronted with it and debate the nature and function of her actions. However, it is also important to note that although the medico-scientific technology of cosmetic and genetic surgery is becoming increasingly widely available, the 'real' flesh body and its chromosomal micro-parts is a largely unpredictable medium for science and performance. So while it is possible to create a computerised image of what a face may potentially look like, it is impossible to know how the body may react during the surgery or afterwards during the process of healing. In this way, the body affirms its presence and control as it goes about dealing with the surgical assault, the resultant pain and restoration of the flesh.

Although Orlan denies that she is a masochist arguing that she would rather drink wine with her friends than undergo surgery[79], thus deflecting criticism that deliberately pathologises her actions, I have suggested that her performance

work and project as a whole may be considered in a masochistic light, not because of the 'pain' Orlan undergoes in surgery but because the project requires her to masochistically submit her self to her self-prescribed physical and psychological re-making. The pain/pleasure of her original performances and the aftermath of healing is recouped in her pleasure/pain/fame as artist/ performer and her numerous subsequent lectures, conferences and symposia. Like Freud's young grandson, Orlan as masochist takes control over the circumstances of her transformation, deliberately manipulating her own dis-appearance (Fort) in order to fashion her re-appearance (Da). I have argued that Orlan's work, like the other performances I have considered is very much concerned with exploring the nature and limits of subjectivity through the use of masochistic performance practices.

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[1] David Gale, 'Knife Work' , *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, 1995, p31
[2] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*,1989, p75.
[3] Orlan, 'Conference' in *This is my body...This is my software*, 1996, p88.
[4] Sarah Wilson, 'L'histoire d'O : Sacred and Profane' , *The is my body... This is my software,* 1996, " A measuring took place in 1976 in Nice with the artist Ben at the Pompidou Centre in 1977, in Aix-la-Chappelle at the Neue Galerie and in Strasburg in 1978, and the following year in Lyons. The musée Saint-Pierre, Lyons 'measured' in April, 1979", p11.
[5] Ibid., p11.
[6] Carey Lovelace, 'Orlan : Offensive Acts', *Performing Arts Journal*, 1995, No.49, pp13-25.
[7] "I supply the canvas. Give me the paint." Orlan at her *Art and Prostitution* exhibition held at La Différance in Nice. See Sarah Wilson, 'L'histoire d'O : Sacred and Profane', *The is my body... This is my software,* 1996, p11.
[8] Orlan, 'Conference' ,*This is my body...This is my software,* 1996, p85.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Michelle Hirschhorn, 'Orlan- artist in the post human age of mechanical reincarnation : body as ready (to be re-) made', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts,* ed. Griselda Pollock, 1997, p111.
[11] Sander L.Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: a cultural history of aesthetic surgery*, 1999, p323.
[12] 'Her plan, modestly entitled The Ultimate Masterpiece: The Reincarnation of St Orlan, is first of all to give herself an ideal face...She is 46 and still rather ugly -even after six operations out of a planned series of 20. You can't help thinking that her pug-like face would need something more than the skill of a surgeon's knife to reach the Grecian ideal of perfection.' Nick Rosen, 'The Birth - by surgeon's scalpel - of Venus', *The Telegraph*, The Arts Section,14th November 1993. Also see Andy Beckett, 'Suffering for her art', *The Independent on Sunday*, 14th April 1996.

[13] James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis*, 1999, p75.
[14] Phillip A Mellor and Chris Shilling, 'Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death', *Sociology*, Vol.27, No.3, August 1993, pp 411-431.
[15] 'We "pass" in order to regain control of ourselves and to efface that which is seen (we believe) as different, which marks us as visible in the world. Relieving the anxiety of being placed into a visible, negative category, aesthetic surgery provides relief from imagining oneself as a stereotype.' Sander L. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery*, 1999, p331.
[16] According to Urla and Swedlund, there is a tendency to blur distinctions or even conflate the terms 'norm' and 'ideal' in relation to the measured / weighed body. See Jacqueline Urla & Alan C Swedlund, 'The Anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling the Ideals of the Feminine Body in Popular Culture', *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference In Science and Popular Culture,* eds. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, 1995.
[17] Orlan, 'Conference', *This is my body...This is my software*, 1996, p88.
[18] Ibid., p83
[19] Linda Weintraub, Thomas McEvilley et al., *Art of the Edge and Over,* 1996, p81.
[20] Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality,* 1994, p116.
[21] Mary Russo points out the original meaning of the word as "*seeing for oneself*". Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 1995, p121.
[22] Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Difference,*1996, pp141-159.
[23] Anne Karpf, *Doctoring the Media: The Reporting of Health and Medicine,* 1988, p184.
[24] Debashis Singh, 'How true to life are medical dramas?' http://www.studentbmj.com/back_issues/st09s12.html
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned,* 1995, p2.
[28] Jane Goodall, 'Whose Body?: Ethics and Experiment in Performance Art'. http://central.com.au/artmed/papers/goodall.html
[29] Ibid.
[30] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,*1982, pp3-4.
[31] Elizabeth Grosz, 'The Body of Signification', *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva,* eds. John Fletcher, Andrew Benjamin, 1990, p90.
[32] Julia Kristeva, 1982, pp101-103, Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*,1989, p75.
[33] Annie Griffin, 'Facial Figurations', *New Statesman and Society*, 12th April 1996, p30.
[34] Pamela Reynolds, "The art of Fat: Elizia Volkmann's Big Project". http://www.winmagazine.org/issues/issue14/win14d.htm
[35] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers,* trans. Alphonso Lingis, 1993, p55.
[36] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor +Aids and Its Metaphors*, 1991, 'The most terrifying illnesses are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing, literally so." p125.
[37] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Notes towards a Corporeal Feminism' in *Australian Feminist Studies* 1987, p5.
[38] James Elkins, 1999, p44.
[39] Ibid., p47.
[40] ibid., p47.
[41] Orlan, 'Conference' in *This is my body...This is my software*, 1996, p91.
[42] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption,* 1991, pp181-238.

[43] Orlan, 'Conference' , *This is my body...This is my software*, 1996, p88
[44] Ibid., p91
[45] Orlan, *'Camal Art' Manifesto*, http:www.cicv.fr/creation_artistique/online/orlan/manifeste/carnal.html, "Only the voice of Orlan remains unchanged".
[46] Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies*, 2000, p23.
[47] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux,*1988, p115.
[48] Elizabeth Grosz, 1989, p39.
[49] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 1985, p201.
[50] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1988, p115.
[51] Elaine Scarry, 1985, p4
[52] Julia Kristeva, 1982, p38
[53] 'The gallery empties of a third of its audience.' Carey Lovelace, 'Offensive Acts' , *Performing Arts Journal*, No 49,1995, p13., "In the ICA audience, some people have developed a sudden interest in their shoes." Andy Beckett, *The Independent on Sunday,* 14th April 1996, "Several people leave, I wouldn't mind being one of them." Judith Palmer, *The Independent,* 20th April 1996.
[54] Elizabeth Grosz, 1989, p73.
[55] Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque Origins, Iconography, Techniques*, 1987, p28.
[56] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: risk, excess and modernity*,1995, p116.
[57] Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, 2000, p29
[58] ibid., p30
[59] Maaike Bleeker , 'Death, Digitalization and Dys-appearance' ,*Performance Research*, 4 (2), 1999, p1.
[60] Eugene Thacker, 'Performing the Technoscientific Body : RealVideo Surgery and the Anatomy Theater' , *Body and Society,* 1999, p320.
[61] Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn,* trans. Lee Hoinacki, 1993, pp2-4.
[62] Thomas Sutcliffe, "Don't dismiss the craziness of modern artists - they go where six-year-olds fear to tread" , *The Independent,* 5th October 1996 , "Some people suffer from a condition called dysmorphophobia, addictively visiting plastic surgeons to alter their appearance - so does the artist Orlan, who records her grisly transformations on videotape [...] For my money, Orlan urgently needs to see a doctor, not another surgeon",. Also see Hugh Hebert, *The Guardian,* 2nd November 1994, p6. Adrian Searle, *The Guardian*, 14th December 1999, p12.
[63] Orlan, 'Conference', *This is my body...This is my software,* 1996, p89
[64] Thomas McEvilley, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society*, 1996, p80.
[65] Parveen Adams, 'Operation Orlan', *This is my body...This is my software,*1996, p57.
[66] Anne Noggle produced a series of photographs called Face-Lift Series in 1975. See Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the 20th Century,*1996, pp177-179.
[67] Sander L. Gilman, 1999, p6.
[68] Anne Balsamo, 'On The Cutting Edge: Cosmetic surgery and the technological production of the gendered body', *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1998, p224.
[69] Ibid., p226
[70] Kathryn Pauly Morgan, ' Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies', *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*', ed. Donn Welton, p336.
[71] Ibid., p342.
[72] Orlan, 'Conference', *This is my body...This is my software*, 1996, p91.

[73] Orlan, *Meta/Morphosis* at the EGO symposium, May 8th, 2001, Old Operating Theatre, London.
[74] Jim McClellan, *The Observer,* 17th April 1994, p38.
[75] Orlan, 'Conference', *This is my body...This is my software*, p92.
[76] Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 1993, p126.
[77] Julia Kristeva, 1982, p3.
[78] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 1991,p187.
[79] Orlan, 'Conference' *This is my body...This is my software*, p92.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated how patriarchal discourses of power, that I believe effectively circumscribe the definitional limits of 'desirable' subjectivity, may be challenged or resisted by the use of masochism as an artistic trope. By providing a context and analysis of the work of six performance artists I have been able to demonstrate how a masochistic performance approach has been a key element in the making of performances that question, provoke and/ or undermine assumptions concerning the nature of contemporary Western subjectivity. The diversity seen in the working methods of these performers gives an indication of the complexity and multifarious nature of masochism when it is used as a performance approach. While the adoption of masochistic theorising in my analysis highlights the points at which performers' work shares common elements and concerns.

The Body as a Site

One of the shared features of these performer's work, with perhaps the exception of Karen Finley, is their mutual concern with the making of work that directly deals with breaking through the boundaries of the body in a quite literal way. Such actions of opening / penetration have a powerful and evocative effect on both themselves and those who watch. For the audience this evidence of 'liveness' and viscerality can be both repulsive and compelling, emphasising what I have argued is the (controlled) 'risk' borne by the performer as well as the ephemeral nature of the event, which is not essentially concerned with producing commodifiable artistic 'products' but with engaging in exploratory experiences that exceed the limits of the performers' everyday subjectivity, and are shared by an audience of witnesses.

The Psychoanalytic, Literary and Cultural Model

Psychoanalytic theory has been particularly useful to me because it elaborated a discourse of sexual resistance enacted through masochistic means and revealed the cultural construction of sexual pathology. By examining the way in which the discourse of masochism has been constructed, it has been possible for me to consider the potential personal and political efficacy inherent in masochistic actions, and by extension how their use in a performance situation may be utilised to subvert or offer a critique of hegemonic notions of 'desirable' subjectivity. For instance Reik's understanding of masochistic fantasy has been comparatively considered in relation to the creative act of performance making, which requires the performer to create and enact something that arises from their imagination. I have argued that this process allows for the mental play and re-orchestration of traditional patriarchal ideas and structures in ways that open up the possibility of reformation so that the 'Father' may no longer remain as the central authority. By deliberately manipulating these ideas, masochistic performers demonstrate their agency. Marina Abramović has spoken of the way in which an image or 'fantasy' occurs to her, and that regardless of how difficult or outrageous the idea, it stays with her until she has found some way of enacting it. In the process of the idea's gestation it will be examined and pared down in an attempt to distil the idea's essence. This process is comparable to the mental manipulation referred to previously. Karen Finley, as a self-proclaimed 'medium' in performance, verbalises 'obscene' fantasies in ways that try to draw the audience's attention to the self-perpetuating sado-masochistic cultural economy of U.S. society. Ron Athey draws upon his own experiences and religious background in imaginatively creating fantasy performances that subvert the authority he once accorded God. Franko B

and Kira O'Reilly have both creatively appropriated stigmatic imagery that makes reference to their renounced faith and its associations with patriarchal authority in a way that complicates our interpretations of this Christian imagery and its underlying power structures. Whilst Orlan, in fantasising how it might be possible to reduce the distance between the image she saw of herself in the mirror and her internalised 'authentic' self, produced a computer-generated composite image of her 'possible' future self before attempting to 'become' this image through surgery. Through the use of fantasy, it is possible that the masochistic performer develops a powerful sense of their own agency. An agency experienced as a result of engaging with fantasy as a means of subverting prescribed ideas about 'desirable' subjectivity. Through fantasy, the masochistic performer is able to resist power at the same level at which it operates upon the subject, that is, at a personal level, which may be understood as having indirect political efficacy. However, through the public demonstration of 'fantasy' by the masochistic performer, the intensely personal is recognised as political. So that, in their turn, spectators/ witnesses contribute to the subversive potential of these actions through their testimony, reinforcing the agency of the masochistic performer.

Witness

The notion of witnessing and it's relationship to masochistic enactment where the masochist requires his or her 'pain' and/or 'humiliation' to be seen by others, is a particularly significant element in masochistic performance, particularly performances discussed in this thesis that may be 'read' as difficult images to perceive, assimilate and interpret and thus require re-visitation as remembrances. That is, the witness is pressed towards, through and beyond the limits of their ability

to comprehend during the experience of performance, and that in the desire to make meaning from the experience and to re-inscribe limits, the witness returns to the experience as memory. I would like to conclude that potentially there is both a personal and political efficacy bound up in the performer/s and witnesses mental residue or memory of the performance that gains its force in remaining as experience and imagery that required an extended period of reflection in the aftermath of the performance. And that the witness, during this process of assimilation to fill the 'gap' in meaning created by these challenging performances, may find a space has opened up for the making of new associations and ways of seeing. For instance, Athey's work in Croatia, where the recent war has resulted in political fragmentation and an acute awareness of the mortal body, was very well received. In this context Athey's performances exceeded the boundaries of its cultural specificity as a North American work 'about AIDS', instead finding a new resonance as an efficacious and cathartic work about struggle, suffering and death. The Croats recognised the similarities between the challenges they faced and Athey's positioning, but also were aware and acknowledged the very different cultural and political context from which the work arose. 'Witnessing' accepts that to comprehend and make meaning from a text is an active and a political stance that requires an additional degree of engagement with the work in question. 'Witnessing' also accepts that to puzzle over a text, to deal with an initial or protracted period of incomprehension is an important, indeed crucial part of the process and function of a witness. In addition, because masochistic performance may push the performers up against themselves in situations of endurance and/or 'pain', both the performer and, in a qualitatively different way, the witness may experience a level of immersion in events that 'shatters' their own sense of self. But I would also like to note that at the same time it is impossible to calculate, determine or otherwise

control how meaning is made from any piece, or how this meaning might be disseminated given this very power of the spectator or witness to 're-make' the text through their own experience, analysis and interpretation. That is not to say that a performance text can mean anything but merely to acknowledge and stress that there is no single fixed and irrefutable meaning necessarily bound up in the text.

Historical Context

In the early parts of my thesis I wanted to provide an historical framework for masochistic performance and for the sorts of cultural, political and social concerns that have been at issue since the 1970s. Writers like Kathy O'Dell suggest that it wasn't until the 1970s that masochism as a performance trope emerged significantly. Certainly the limited nature of this thesis means that I have confined myself to performance artists who emerged in or after the 1970s, highlighting the context from which their work emerged and how it continues in the present. For the purposes of my thesis I used the extensive performance history of Marina Abramović and Orlan, as well as the cultural debates that have surrounded Karen Finley and Ron Athey's work, in order to situate a number of developments in art and culture that I believe became "instantiated" through masochistic performance both in Eastern Europe and in the West. By using the work of Marina Abramović, I was able to make what I believe is an important distinction between what I have termed 'risk' based performance and masochistic performance. I felt it was important to differentiate between these two concepts because of the importance of control as a concept in masochism and the parallel implication of power invested in the idea of control, opposing this to notions of 'risk'. The retention of a degree of control has played a part in every one of the performances that I have designated

as masochistic because as I note in my introduction, "The masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone."[1] That is, the masochist is always the controlling party and avoids, as far as possible, actions that they themselves have not prescribed. But, as I have argued, what gave these performances their dynamism and tension was the sense that the performers were pushing up against the pre-set parameters that were effectively their known boundaries of control. For instance sometimes performers played on the borderland of consciousness including Abramović in *Night Sea Crossing* , Franko B in *I'm Not Your Babe*, Ron Athey in *4 Scenes*, Myer Rikin and Ron Athey in *Deliverance* as well as Kira O'Reilly's *Bad Humours/Affected.*

Inversions of Power

Masochistic performance allows for, or rather may deliberately manipulate situations in order to invert established hierarchies of power through the enactment of reversals, as I discussed in my introduction and then in my analysis of individual performances. In this process the arbitrary nature of these structures of power are exposed and revealed as constructs; constructs that are capable of being reconstructed in alternative ways that may go some way towards challenging and perhaps even redressing disparities in power. The surgical operations of Orlan reverse the conventional surgeon / patient relationship. Orlan, herself 'dictates' how her operations shall take shape and proceed, in a way that contravenes the sort of surgical etiquette that places medical authority centre stage. Karen Finley's work operates through a continuous series of reversals that have her oscillating between the position of the sadist and the victim, exposing the oppressions tied up in the continued predominance of these power relations by shifting between these

contrasting subject positions. For instance, Finley takes on the part of a male (usually featured as sadist) producing a harsh and damning parody of certain male attitudes towards women and others, in the process revealing the dark and sometimes desperate humour characteristic of masochistic reversals, designed as they are to undercut patriarchy. Ron Athey reveals the performative nature of gender by wearing drag during some parts of his work reversing the expected 'dress' code and behaviour for men. When he's not wearing drag he is often naked, revealing the 'unveiled' penis as fragile and vulnerable, in a manner similar to Franko B's honest exposure. They both parody the presentation of the male body and masculinity as hard and inviolable, preferring to acknowledge the erotic (homo and hetero) gaze and presenting their position as the 'castrated'. But as the 'castrated' it is clear that they are not the excluded and repressed of the conventional Oedipal site. Instead they demonstrate their success in achieving a 'rebirth' or re-making of themselves in a way that does not require or wish for the authorisation of the paternal order discussed in my introduction. This contrasts to the masochistic performance work of someone like Chris Burden in the 1970s, which can be interpreted on one level as a violence shown towards and enacted upon himself in order to reconfirm and reinforce a sense of his own male virility and control. He reinforces his invulnerability and inviolability – in other words his 'impenetrability', through undertaking ordeals that use such things as nails and guns -conventionally masculine 'tools'. Athey, Franko B and Burden, however, all demonstrate that penetration does not necessarily imply submission, but the important difference between Burden's performance work when compared with Franko B and Athey's is that Burden resists these actions in order to bolster his masculinity, whereas Franko B and Athey embrace acts of penetration in order to question and subvert male (sexual) conventions and present another way of

achieving a male subjectivity that doesn't necessarily subscribe to the heterosexual imperatives of patriarchal authority.

Transcending the Flesh?

It is interesting to note that all these performers have produced works that are in some way religiously or spiritually referential, and whilst the appropriation of religious iconography or symbolism may be interpreted by some as blasphemous, the connection between religious faith and masochistic practices has proved to be an interesting source of intersecting ideas. One of these ideas is to do with our understanding of the transitory and mortal nature of the flesh that I believe has been complicated in the contemporary climate by the increasing presence of a medical and technological hegemony that appears to have increased expectations for the performance of the body, which in tum increases the potential for a sense of alienation from a body that does not perform according to expectation. Orlan's work points towards what it is possible to achieve through surgical intervention, whilst at the same time her work underscores what it is to be inescapably flesh-bound and imperfectable. Both Kira O'Reilly and Franko B stage the bleeding body as a corporeal reality at a time when the medico-scientific management of bodies works to contain the bloody reality of our interiors. Furthermore, medical science has diagnosed Athey as having a fatal virus present in his body that could at any time result in an illness that could lead to his death. In *Deliverance* Athey stages the suffering, administered to body that is finally bagged and buried in several inches of soil on stage. I argued that by submitting himself to this death fantasy, when shamanistic techniques for treatment fail, he reduces the power death has upon his present existence. By enacting his death Athey plays against the discourse of

science with, as Susan Sontag notes, its battle metaphors used to encourage an attitude of resistance to illness and death. Instead he inoculates himself with this enactment. Death is partially reduced, partially contained as a force to be feared because through the process of the performance he has already 'become' the dead and buried.

Polymorphous Perversity

I have examined how phallocentrism, since Freud, has been inherent in Western constructions of sexual pleasure and how the work of Ron Athey and Franko B subvert the patriarchal authority inherent in a phallocentric understanding of the body and bodily sensation. Athey does this most overtly through the enactment of a symbolic castration carried out with a staple gun and in his arms' penetration with hooks (both scenes in *Deliverance*), but even his presentation of his naked body, penis exposed and vulnerable undercuts the power of the phallus that Gallop argued is usually conflated with the male body. I also considered whether to receive or be penetrated is necessarily submissive and how the cultural inscription of reception as both female and submissive might be questioned through masochistic enactment to reveal the subversive potential of penetration. That through opening, specifically the cutting or breaking of the skin, the many surfaces of the body could potentially become multifarious sites of heightened sensation. This shifts the central focus away from the penis as the primary and central locus of sensation and allows for an extension of the sensual surfaces of the body away from the confines of genitality. Both Ron Athey and Franko B's work instigates a provocation towards representations of masculinity and male sexual behaviour in pieces that have Christian symbolism embedded in them. The result is complex palimpsest pieces

that draw upon the naked, yielding imagery of martyrdom to comment upon the nature of their own experience as men.

Female Masochism

My thesis has refuted the early Freudian conflation of women with masochistic impulses. Instead the female masochistic performer can be understood as exercising personal agency in ways that are both personally and politically efficacious. Orlan does this through performing both a deconstruction of herself and the surgical trope she has adopted for the purposes of the performance. She continually enacts her critique of contemporary ideals of beauty, her face both being and representing an exposition of the arbitrary and constructed nature of facial aesthetics. While the location of her operation /performances on the face enabled me to examine how the face is understood as a site of identity, and how her remaking of this part of the body could be used to raise crucial questions about the location of the self, particularly in a society increasingly faced with choices regarding the potential scientific and technological possibilities for altering the body. Karen Finley's work, in enacting a challenge to prescribed notions of femininity, explores the nature and function of the obscene body and the obscene's relationship to masochism, in a way that highlights the cultural investment in maintaining the 'desirable' subjectivity of the 'docile body' that I have argued is at the root of a sado-masochistic economy of power. Kira O'Reilly undergoes a ritual 'healing' that evokes the 'hysterical' female body as well as the religious ascetic. In her public exposure and enactment she acknowledges that she receives a variety of responses that, I suggest, stress the complexity and multiplicity of the gaze; a gaze that includes the potential fluctuations characteristic of witnessing, and the witness's oscillations between identification and objectification. Her silence throughout the

performance demonstrates her commitment to communicating through the body. The absence of language is a refusal to make meaning through the patriarchally defined symbolic order. In my analysis of her work I have emphasised some of the difficulties that are tied up with the presentation of the female body, difficulties which are also pertinent to consider in relation to some of Karen Finley's and Marina Abramović work, which have also involved partial or complete nudity.

Shattering the Self

Leo Bersani's notion of "psychic shattering" and Karmen MacKendrick's suggestions with regard to the ability of pain and restraint to induce a fragmentation of the subject that releases the subject from the confines of a rigidly defined subjectivity, enables the possibility of imagining other subjective possibilities. By extension this allows for the idea of a subjectivity that is constantly changing, a palimpsest text written and rewritten in a continual process of revision, reflection, and remembering. It might be argued that this expansion has the potential to dangerously undermine identity claims that deliberately maintain and emphasise the specificity of bodies formed by society and culture, but I would argue that this need not be the case. For instance, Marina Abramović retains the particularities of her identity whilst also pushing beyond her usual subjective experience of herself. Something she has achieved through a number of approaches that include endurance related activities, where the physical demands and limitations placed upon herself through the stipulations of a performance contract, that is in effect, 'written' by the performer, allows her a temporary loss of ego that I am suggesting is comparable to 'psychic shattering'. Karen Finley's ability to verbally slip through and between subject positions in many of her monologues (both performed and written), effects a sense of fragmentation and, importantly, ambiguity, so that her 'story' – if

indeed any of it is 'her' story, is virtually indistinquishable from the voices of other positions she adopts for the purposes of her performance. This is something that Finley believes she achieves by tapping into the psychic pain she feels pervades contemporary American society. Her own ego apparently obscured in the interests of accommodating the fragmentary voices of other subject positions. Orlan's surgery too, enacts a 'shattering' effect on herself, on the 'witness' of her performances, and on ideas of beauty that provide a number of points of departure for further debate. The unfinished nature of the project that Orlan has both produced and is, continues the interpretative convolutions and disallows closure of the text in a way that increases the potential political efficacy of her work as a challenge to conventional standards of beauty and to notions of there being a single site of identity located in the face. Ron Athey more literally uses pain and restraint to 'shatter' and dissipate his sense of himself as a bounded entity. Pain, and the inability to escape from pain implied by restraint, is the performative means whereby Athey dissolves his sense of integrity and wholeness in favour of a (temporary) loss of ego boundaries that I discussed in chapter 4 as a means of evading the restrictive or limiting dictates that characterise notions of 'desirable' subjectivity. Such masochistic performance demonstrates that subjectivity, like the body is not a sealed construct, that there always remains an interpretative 'gap' in the fluctuating formulation of subjectivity that allows for experimentation and 'resistance'.

Masochist as Shaman

I would like to suggest that the masochistic performer undertakes a metaphoric journey. A journey in which performers undertake and endure a process of

psychological and physical unmaking and remaking that culminates in masochistic enactments/ performances that continually exceed the limits of their subjectivity. In order to achieve this, the performer undertakes a process that involves a psychological "dismemberment, scraping away of the flesh, substitution of viscera, and renewal of blood during trance and dream states."[2] In less metaphorical terms I believe the masochistic performer by drawing upon the deepest substance of themselves, often in quite literal ways, make themselves vulnerable, expose their 'shame' and deliberately engage with an experience of 'pain' in order to share the rawness of their subjective experience with witnesses in ways that throw into sharp relief power disparities intrinsic to and supportive of our phallocentric culture. This frank and extreme exposure may be considered the first personal steps towards gaining a sense of the political agency of these actions and their wider impact as sources of socio-political challenge and inquiry into a society invested in maintaining standard notions of 'desirable' subjectivity.

Some Reflections on the Thesis

I began this research in an attempt to find an interpretative model or approach that might be used to help me make sense of what I found to be 'difficult' performance work ; work that was in some way 'painful' to watch and make meaning from. These works I found unsettling, unfathomable as well as compelling. This work tended to come from performance artists and my focus has remained on this area of performance, both because of the necessarily limited nature of this thesis and because performance artists tend to be voices from the margins of a culture or society and as such are often concerned with some sort of subversion of dominant or mainstream culture, which seemed to be bound up with the use of an apparently extreme performance methodology. In order to explore this, I chose the work of

artists who are or were at some point considered controversial, in order to try to further articulate what masochistic performance practices might tell us about the cultural climate of the time in which such works were received. Further research might include a more extensive search for and examination of masochistic performance before the 1970s and in non-Western societies, comparatively considering the significance of these actions both historically, politically and cross-culturally. My examination of Abramović's work has made me conscious of a much larger body of East European performance work that could not be addressed by this thesis. Work made by artists who, because of the volatility and rigidity of the regimes they worked under, risked their social as well as their physical security in making provocative and politically charged work that is little known in the West.

As I have comparatively considered in my chapter on Ron Athey, the reaction of an audience to masochistic artists may well expose the specific preoccupations and insecurities of a society or at least of individuals within that society. The confrontational and challenging nature of the pieces are unlikely to leave any audience member completely unaffected, whether the piece is clearly concerned with political and social injustices or with altering the condition of the body as a covert or overt political or personal statement. However, I acknowledge that the resonance created by a performance or a negative media reception to a performance, may prevent people from wanting to consider or even entertain the idea that what is on display has radical potential. That is, in provoking extreme reactions from their audiences, audiences may attempt to block any further exploratory considerations of the experience, becoming witnesses that fail to, or refuse to 'give testimony'. Or, as Phelan says, we cannot assume that the testimony that is given will accord with the particular view or 'message' advocated by the

performer / performance[3]. Additionally, because much of the audience for this type of work is self-selecting, it may be understood, by some, as having limited political efficacy. That is, it speaks only to those who are open to it, and these audiences are likely to be conversant with the sorts of issues expressed anyway. On the other hand, because of the wide spread use of video, internet and computer technology the circulation of performance documentation is rapidly increasing and this will undoubtedly create new audiences curious or interested in the work or the ramifications of the work, and may be keen to consider its resonance and to offer alternative insights into these practices. It would be interesting to examine in greater detail the impact of this type of performance work on audiences and whether reactions and interpretations change over extended periods of time or after subsequent exposure to performances.

I accept that it may be considered problematic for me to have tried to frame these pieces through diagnostic criteria originally designed to locate and define psychopathology, both in terms of considering whether such theory can be applied to the performance situation, and in terms of defining these works as masochistic, which could be said to impose unnecessary limitations on an interpretative understanding of these works. Additionally, by framing my argument using this model I am dependent on its presence and thus its continued importance as a discourse, even in the act of trying to subvert it. However, I maintain that in using this model to read against the socially constructed model of masochism as 'illness' and in reclaiming its own terms as terms of subversion still provides a useful means of finding an interpretative 'way in' to aspects of this type of performance work. I make no claims to providing anything definitive or for suggesting that all that occurs in, or arises from these performances, can be contained by a masochistic

framework or interpretation.

Another potentially problematic aspect of my research arose in trying to make some sort of distinction between acts of masochism that have radical potential and those that I suggest do not challenge patriarchal norms, and may in fact re-inscribe them in what I have called socially-sanctioned acts of masochism. This was not always an easy distinction to make, in part because of the role the audience plays in the reading of a work, and in part because of the difficulty in locating the machinations of power, particularly in relation to issues of control. This is regardless of whether this is personally, culturally or politically determined control we are talking about.

Moreover, there are those that would argue that performers that work in this way with the body are really suffering from a psychopathology and require our help not our voyeurism. I endeavoured to make a distinction between resistant masochism and 'damaging' or 'destructive' acts based upon the idea of control and choice, as well as the ability to self-consciously and publicly engage in masochistic practices. However, to determine where control starts and ends for an individual is a difficult limit to ascertain with any degree of acuity. This indeterminacy raises some interesting and problematic questions. For instance, *Joyce* (2002) the most recent touring performance work of Ron Athey dealt with a number of 'characters' from Athey's early childhood. Athey appeared on stage with the other members of the cast, who variously played his mother, his aunt and his sister. These characters also appeared on video. However, another man, who was not part of the touring production, was used to perform the part of the young Athey on video. This man had been videoed in the bathroom cutting himself. Aside from his appearance in this video, we as spectators/ witnesses, have no further contact with or information

about the person featured. So how do we understand and interpret the actions of this man? And what does the inclusion of this video lend to the piece? Are his actions real or part of an aesthetic? What sorts of lines are we drawing if we try to make a distinction? And if we do draw lines, what sorts of discourses are those differentiations based upon? This section of *Joyce* is particularly significant because it prompts us to recognise that the work itself questions the limits of interpretative frameworks adopted to give meaning to such imagery and in so doing it demonstrates a potential for posing continuously relocating challenges to spectators/ witnesses.

In addition, further research might explore the potential connections between religious renunciation and changes in status. More specifically the links between acts apparently performed to repudiate the flesh body and the instincts, and acts designed to elicit a certain sort of prestige or resistance. In particular I would like to look at the way women were involved in these sorts of actions and what might be inferred by their participation. Moreover, part of this research might involve a further consideration of the relationship between the use of Christian iconography in performance, a Kristevan understanding of abjection, and the idea of 'purity' achieved through submission to abjection.

This thesis has interrogated the nature and function of what I am calling masochistic performance practices as they have evolved in a variety of contexts in Europe and North America, but as a thesis, it is necessarily limited and, as I have suggested, using 'masochism' as a concept to encapsulate these practices presents a number of problems. However, I believe I have both demonstrated that there is validity in terming these performances masochistic and that masochistic performance does

provide a means of subverting and questioning the locus of power through a corporeal enactment that resists the psychical and physical limits of the body. Through my exploration and analysis of this type of performance work, I believe this thesis demonstrates that masochism as an artistic trope offers a significant generative and productive potential to contemporary society, even if this potential works from the margins. I believe this contributes to contemporary scholarship by providing an interpretative model that demonstrates the socio-political significance of masochistic enactment as well as the communicative potential of this work in times of increasingly complicated technological and personal change.

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism : Coldness and Cruelty,* 1991. First published as 'Le Froid et la Cruel' in *Présentation de Sacher Masoch*, (France, Editions de Minuit, 1967), p75.
[2] Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege : Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*,1996.
[3] Peggy Phelan, 'Preface', to Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment,* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp12-13.

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Abbreviations

'68	1968
A.D.	Anno Domini
A.I.D.S.	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
A.F.A.	American Family Association
C.V.N.	Comites Vietnam National
F.Y.	Financial Year
H.I.V.	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
I.C.A.	Institute of Contemporary Arts
N.E.A.	National Endowment for the Arts
P.S. 122	Performance Space 122
Rev.	Reverend
Sen.	Senator
S/M	Sadomasochism
U.S.A.	United States of America
VST	Vie Sociale et Traitements
vs.	versus